

The sustainable management of wild
deer populations in England:
a review of 2005-2008 and summary
of action to March 2011





Foreword

Wild deer are a valuable part of our natural heritage. They fulfil important ecological roles and provide other benefits such as opportunities for recreational nature-watching and sustainable venison harvesting. These are examples of the 'ecosystem services' that deer provide. However, with the introduction of new species and the absence of natural predators, among other factors, there is a wealth of evidence that growing numbers of deer are causing adverse effects on the natural systems that support them. Degradation of woodland habitats and damage to agriculture is common, and the welfare of deer can also suffer.

The 2005-2008 Deer Action Plan provided, for the first time, a clear structure for delivering the Defra network's objectives for wild deer in England. I am very pleased with progress to date and believe that the Plan has proved successful as a catalyst for ensuring coordinated and positive action towards a sustainable wild deer population in England. The Deer Initiative has successfully identified a model for joint working between the public and private sectors which is helping to achieve improvements to our nationally important lowland woodland sites.

There is however still work to be done and I am pleased to continue this initiative for the following three-year period.

In particular we need to focus our efforts on reducing deer-vehicle collisions, consolidating improvements in protected habitats at risk from deer, and in building capacity to tackle disease issues in wild deer. This will require a strengthening of the landscape-scale approach, which in turn will require increased collaboration between landowners on the ground.

Government will continue to play a key role in pursuing the actions set out in this document, but the participation of stakeholders and the co-operation of individual deer managers is pivotal to achieving what is in everybody's interest: a long-term commitment to sustainable deer populations.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Huw". The signature is written in a cursive style and is underlined with a thick black horizontal line.

Huw Irranca-Davies MP

Minister for the Marine and Natural Environment

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1. Introduction

There are six species of wild deer in England: red and roe are native, while fallow, sika, muntjac and Chinese water deer are all introduced species. Populations of wild deer have been increasing rapidly in the last 40 years and there is increasing evidence of negative impacts of deer at various localities across the country. These impacts include damage to habitats, agriculture, forestry and increasing numbers of deer-vehicle collisions (DVCs). When sustainably managed, wild deer play a positive role in the natural environment, and can support rural jobs and businesses.

Defra's aim is to ensure a well-managed and healthy wild deer population in England, which presents no threat to long-term environmental, social, or economic sustainability, and to limit, as far as practicable, further spread of the recently introduced non-native species.

Government has a role to play in providing the right framework to support sustainable management (often in partnership with key stakeholders), but **the primary responsibility for deer management lies with landowners and deer managers.**

In December 2004 the Defra family of organisations (which at the time comprised Defra, the Forestry Commission, English Nature and the Countryside Agency) published "The sustainable management of wild deer populations in England: an action plan". This set out actions for the Defra family for the period up to March 2008.

During this time English Nature and the Countryside Agency were replaced by the new non-departmental public body, Natural England, which also took over the role of the Rural Development Service (RDS). In this document 'Natural England' (NE) will be used to cover Natural England, English Nature, RDS and the Countryside Agency.

The aims of this document are firstly to review the achievements of the period December 2004 to 2008, and secondly to set out key actions to March 2011.



Group of fallow (photo Richard Ford)

2. Overview

During the period covered by the first Deer Action Plan (2005-8) there were a significant number of successes. Crucially, private and public-sector stakeholders have worked in partnership with the Defra family, now known as the Defra network (which includes Defra, Natural England, the Forestry Commission), and this has set the parameters for the future sustainable management of wild deer in England.

We have introduced legislation to give landowners more flexibility to manage deer. Indications are that the reduction of the female close season for fallow deer in particular has resulted in an increase in the cull of over 10%. The introduction of new EU Meat Hygiene legislation has supported an increase in local venison production and sales. This has been achieved without any reported welfare issues and should reduce the requirement for deer out of season and night shooting. Grant schemes for woodland and environmental stewardship are now better integrated with deer management at the site level and increasingly at the landscape-scale. Government remains committed to ensuring that management of deer on the public estate achieves the highest standards of best practice and serves as an example to promote sustainable deer management more widely.

The Defra network has played a full part in the Deer Initiative Partnership (DI) which, supported by its executive arm Deer Initiative Ltd., is working well at the national and at the local level. There is now close collaboration between the Defra network, and the private sector facilitated by the DI to identify and achieve joint targets. Encouragingly, the funding and resources provided by the Defra network has been more than matched by the cash and in-kind support from private sector organisations, individual landowners and deer managers.

Bovine TB is one of several diseases transmissible between domestic livestock and deer, and deer are one of the hosts for Lyme disease which can affect humans. Surveys to look at the levels of bovine TB in deer and the associated risks have now been completed, and monitoring and surveillance of disease in deer is part of the new Defra Wildlife Health Strategy.

Increasing wild deer populations means increasing impacts. We now have a system in place for the formal identification of priority areas for protected sites (particularly woodland SSSIs) and the DI also works with its partners to identify priority areas for deer-vehicle collisions, agricultural damage and animal health issues.

We have supported collaborative deer management in the priority areas, which has benefited from DI coordination and local landowner support. The benefit of such a co-ordinated approach is clear: in 2005, of the 22,000 ha of woodland SSSI in England in unfavourable condition, 8,000 ha (36%) was unfavourable as a result of damage by deer. By 2008, this figure had dropped to 4,000 ha (22% of woodland in unfavourable condition), a significant reduction that is largely a result of regional activity, such as the Marches project in the Welsh Borders (see the case study on page 5).

Venison sales continue to increase and initiatives are being taken by various NGOs. The Deer Initiative's Marches project shows that there is a market for the sustainable harvest of venison from the cull required to reduce the negative impacts of wild deer. The Lincolnshire Venison Marketing Project has demonstrated what can be achieved with coordinated marketing and Government 'seed' funding.

A series of over 70 Best Practice Guides on all aspects of deer management has been produced for England and Wales, to complement those produced for Scotland by the Deer Commission for Scotland. The first England and Wales guides were published on the DI website in January 2008 to favourable comment, followed by the remainder of the 70 or so guides as they were completed. They are designed to help deer managers to carry out their work humanely, responsibly and effectively. They support objective management based on best current information, provide support to those seeking qualifications and contribute to the transparency and accountability of deer managers in both the public and private sector.

The Guides are web-based making them accessible to the widest possible audience, and will be updated regularly to ensure that they reflect the latest changes in legislation and best practice. They are expected to become the industry standard.

We now have a coordinated research programme with priorities set through the Deer Research Working Group (DRWG), which brings together a range of stakeholders with different perspectives on deer research to reach agreement on future research requirements. Among the top priorities for ongoing research is that of deer-vehicle collisions (DVCs) and how to reduce the significant number of human and deer fatalities and injuries.

The Deer-Vehicle Collisions Project, with key support from the Highways Agency, has built up a database of incidents to identify the scale and distribution of the problem. It has also trialled a number of novel methods to reduce the risk of collisions at certain DVC hotspots. Influencing driver behaviour is crucial and a joint working group has been set up to help those involved in road safety to educate the public of the risks of DVCs and how to avoid them.

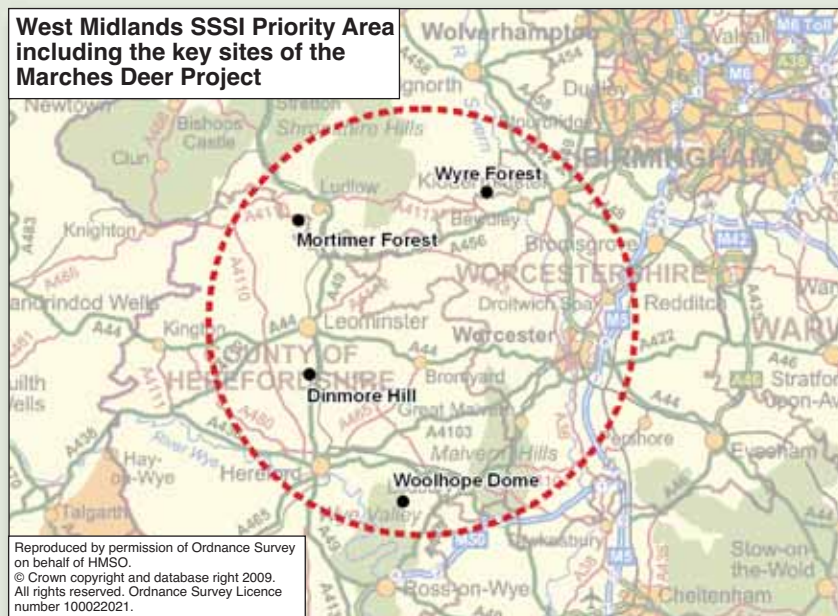
Looking forward to the next period, this review has identified some key follow-up actions to March 2011 for the Defra network and our partners in deer management. For this period, the main focus of our efforts will be in three areas: DVCs; improvements in designated woodland habitats, and animal health issues. Under the ongoing DVCs Project, lead funding from the Highways Agency will enable more work to be done on developing the DVC database to help identify and tackle hotspots and factors underlying deer-related human injuries and fatalities. There will be continued investigation into DVC mitigation techniques as well as support for raising public awareness.

For vulnerable woodland habitats it is important to consolidate the progress already made and build on that by improving impact monitoring and collaborative management on the landscape scale. Collaboration between partners will also enable us to build capacity in recognising and managing disease risks as part of continued monitoring and surveillance.

The Defra network remains convinced that these further actions can only be realised through stakeholder collaboration. It is important to recognise the value of the DI Partnership, and in particular the significant in-kind contribution that the NGOs and local landowners make to sustainable deer management. We believe that the Partnership will continue to demonstrate considerable added value by providing the framework for government and the private sector to work together to deliver agreed common outcomes in an efficient and cost effective manner.

CASE STUDY: The Marches Deer Project

In 2003 the Marches Deer Management Project was established by the Deer Initiative, in partnership with Natural England, the Country Land and Business Association, the Forestry and Timber Association (now merged into ConFor) and the Forestry Commission. This project provides a successful model of how a public/private partnership can bring about real change in deer management at a landscape scale.



The project has achieved:

- An improvement in the condition of the woodland SSSIs in the main project area.
- Increased local and regional awareness of deer, their impacts (particularly on native biodiversity) and the need for their management among private and public sector landowners.
- Increased collaboration between landowners and agreement to carry out more effective landscape scale deer management.
- A significant targeted increase in collaborative culling activities to reduce deer impacts in woodland SSSIs.

The project has also:

- Increased awareness and provided a coordinated approach to deer vehicle collisions.
- Resulted in greater engagement with, and training of, local deer stalkers to undertake more effective humane culling and production of quality venison.
- Successfully promoted the benefits of wild venison to the catering trade and public.

The DI continues to monitor the condition of the SSSIs across the project area.

3. Detailed Review

The structure of this section follows the original 2004 Action Plan (text from which is in *bold italics*). Under each action point there is a section on 'Achievements' (2004-2008) and a section on the 'Further action' (key action for 2009-2011) that we believe is necessary to deliver sustainable deer management in England.

A. Ensuring high quality co-ordinated advice

The Defra family will co-ordinate a range of sources of objective and authoritative advice on best practice in the management of wild deer:

A1. The Deer Initiative was established in 1995 and has built upon a partnership approach to reduce the adverse environmental and economic impact of wild deer, through advice and support. Following an independent evaluation in 2004, the Defra family will continue to fund the Deer Initiative for at least another three years, agreeing priorities, in order to:

- provide advice on co-operative deer management throughout England;*
- focus effort in establishing and supporting Deer Management groups in priority areas;*
- facilitate regional Outreach Seminars on achieving sustainable management of deer populations.*

- Achievements** All Deer Initiative (DI) staff have routinely provided advice to:
- Government and government agencies (national and regional)
 - Landowners
 - Partner organisations

The DI website is now linked to the Partners including the Defra network and provides useful and timely information on all deer management issues, a series of authoritative Best Practice Guides produced by the Partnership, and a guide to the legislative changes made by Defra under the Action Plan.

DEER INITIATIVE PARTNER ORGANISATIONS

Association of Chief Police Officers	Highways Agency
British Association for Shooting and Conservation	Ministry of Defence
British Deer Society	National Farmers' Union
ConFor	National Forest Company
Country Land and Business Association	National Gamekeepers' Organisation
Countryside Alliance	National Trust
Countryside Council for Wales	Natural England
Defra	Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals
Forestry Commission England	Royal Society of Wildlife Trusts
Forestry Commission Wales	Union of Countryside Workers
Forest Research	Veterinary Deer Society
Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust	Woodland Trust

The DI has organised over 150 Deer Awareness Seminars in the last three years across the country as well as attending numerous partner seminars and field visits. The seminars focus on identifying and monitoring impacts and the practical aspects of collaborative deer management at a landscape scale. Seminar audiences have included Government Agencies, NGOs and private landowners and in the East of England alone the DI has briefed over 1500 individuals on the impacts of wild deer.

The second DI National Conference on 'Deer, Habitats and Impacts' was held in Buxton in March 2007 and attracted over 150 delegates each day. Presentations covered a wide range of topics, including DVCs, animal by-products and waste management, game hygiene, diseases in deer, tick-related diseases and collaborative deer management.

Further action The DI negotiated new contracts with its major Government funding partners in 2007, aligned to a revised vision: "the achievement and maintenance of a sustainable and healthy population of wild deer in England and Wales". Under a revised set of strategic objectives, priority outcomes for the period 2008-2011 are to:

- contribute to the conservation and sustainable management of woodlands and other habitats; in particular, the achievement of favourable conservation status of protected areas such as Sites of Special Scientific Interest.
- halt the growth of and subsequently reduce the number and seriousness of deer-vehicle collisions on our roads.
- build the capability to react effectively to contain and control emerging zoonoses and other animal health issues relating to deer.

In addition, the DI will ensure the series of Best Practice Guides remains up to date and reflects any future changes in evidence so they are recognised as an industry benchmark. DI will promote the Best Practice Guides as widely as possible so deer management across the country can be to the highest standards.

The DI will also lead a targeted programme of outreach seminars using Best Practice as a vehicle for raising awareness of landowners, land managers and conservation bodies. The Defra network and the DI will review the awareness of Best Practice in 2011.

While participating fully in the Deer Initiative's work, members of the Defra family will also continue to provide objective and authoritative advice on the management of wild deer specialising in the following areas:

A2. Defra Wildlife Species Conservation (previously European Wildlife) will be responsible for native and non-native species policy.

Achievements The introduction of the first ever Deer Action Plan for England in 2004 and the current review. The GB Non-Native Species Secretariat has commissioned risk assessments of three species of deer, the Chinese water deer, muntjac and sika.

Further action Following the production of the risk assessments and taking into account any recommendations from the GB Non-Native Species Programme Board, Defra will consider whether any of the non-native species of deer need specific strategies over and above the generic policy that applies to all deer in England.

A3. The Defra Veterinary Services (now comprising the Food and Farming Group, Animal Health Agency and the Veterinary Laboratories Agency) will provide advice and information on disease recognition and surveillance, statutory notification, and animal welfare legislation.

Achievements Disease recognition and surveillance: a pilot bovine TB survey, undertaken by the Forestry Commission (FC) of deer in the West Country, was started in December 2005 and completed at the end of February 2006. Disease recognition training was given to FC and DI staff for the survey.

Non-bTB: Defra and the Veterinary Laboratories Agency (VLA) wildlife veterinarians have participated in a number of training programs, conferences and workshops to raise awareness and train deer managers, veterinarians and field staff in disease recognition and the reporting process relating to notifiable diseases in deer.

Further action The DI will continue to advise local landowners in the identified bTB 'hotspots' to address welfare issues involved where there are high levels of bTB in the wild deer population and on management issues to reduce the spread of disease (such as avoiding causing unintentional localised concentrations of deer).

Defra will continue to advise on legislation and government policy as needed, and especially during future disease outbreaks. In light of lessons learned during the 2007 FMD outbreak, Defra will consider amending the Foot-and-Mouth Disease (England) Order 2006.

A4. Forestry Commission England and Forest Research will advise on woodland deer management, population estimation and impact assessments, and woodland deer fencing and damage prevention. They will share experience in carcass handling and larder design and use. Forestry Commission Training Services offer a Woodland Deer Management Course.

Achievements Advice was given by the Forest Research Ecology Division on all topics and formed part of the knowledge transfer element of the FC research programmes noted below. The forest fencing handbook was published in spring 2006. A study to compare three different impact assessment methods was funded (with Sparsholt College, Hants).

Forestry Commission Learning & Development delivered 5 Woodland deer Management Courses since May 2003 (training 59 staff and 6 private sector individuals); 8 Road Casualty Deer events since July 2004 (training 83 FC staff and 26 private sector individuals); 3 Road Casualty Deer courses (two at Sparsholt College in 2007/08 training approximately 30 students, and one to the British Deer Society (BDS) Northern Region training 15 people), and 4 Deer Carcase Preparation and Inspection courses.

Further action Courses and training will continue in order to reach individuals to accommodate the recognised need for deer management

A5. Natural England will advise on biodiversity generally, but particularly with respect to Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs).

- Achievements** Natural England (NE) have delivered 14 SSSI woodland training courses and 5 general woodland training courses to approximately 350 staff and 10 external individuals.
- Further action** NE will continue SSSI woodland training to staff as required. Advice at a site level continues via Advisors.

A6. Natural England will provide general advice to farmers, conservation organisations and the general public on legal methods of both resolving and avoiding deer problems. They will advise Defra on statutory issues relating to notices under the Agriculture Act 1947 and licences under the proposed new provisions in the legislation.

- Achievements** General advisory and statutory work is ongoing. NE Wildlife Advisers are now trained to give advice on deer matters. A Technical Advice Note has now been completed. NE has also taken part in and contributed to the DI Best Practice Working Group.
- Further action** From October 2007, Natural England were given policy and delivery responsibility for licensing under the Deer Act 1991. They will therefore not need to advise Defra in the way envisaged above. They will continue to assess licence applications and advise farmers, conservation organisations and the general public on legal methods of resolving and avoiding deer problems.

Natural England will, where necessary, continue to advise Defra on statutory issues relating to notices under the Agriculture Act 1947. However, the new provisions for licensing may further reduce the need for the use of the Agriculture Act to resolve problems and use of this Act has always been very limited.



Deer Initiative visit to Ashdown Forest (photo Graham Downing)

B. Improving the laws on deer

The number of deer, their distribution and impact has changed over the years. Having taken account of the responses to our consultation in spring 2004, the Defra family agreed to make a number of changes to modernise and update the law on deer management. The following achievements were realised through The Regulatory Reform (Deer) (England and Wales) Order 2007, SI 2007 No.2183 (the Deer RRO), which came into force on 1 October 2007:

B1. Alter the structure of the Act. Where possible, alter the Deer Act 1991 to allow permitted weapons and ammunition, dates of close seasons, and species and sexes of deer to which certain parts of the Act applies, to be listed in statutory instruments, and therefore be more easily updated when needed.

Achievements	The structure of the Act was not changed as all desired changes were achievable without this.
Further action	No further action planned.

B2. Revise Schedule 2 of the Deer Act 1991 with respect to the smaller deer species, to allow use of some of the .22 centre fire calibres, (this is already permitted in Scotland for roe deer), and should be safe and humane for the smaller deer species. It is intended to stipulate the species and firearms/ammunition that this will apply to, using statutory instruments. At present it is envisaged it will apply to muntjac and Chinese water deer only, and the ballistics will be those allowed in Scotland for roe deer.

Achievements	<p>This action has been completed. For muntjac and Chinese water deer the minimum requirements were changed to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a rifle having a calibre of not less than .220 inches • a muzzle energy of not less than 1000 foot pounds • a soft or hollow nosed bullet weighing not less than 50 grains <p style="text-align: right;">[S.3(5) of the Deer RRO]</p>
Further action	No further action is planned.



*Roe buck
(photo: Mike Lane)*



Roe doe (photo:
Richard Ford)

B3. Revise Section 6 of the Deer Act 1991, with regards to actions taken to prevent suffering, in line with the Scottish legislation; such that a person shall not be guilty of an offence in respect of any act done for the purpose of preventing suffering.

Achievements Section 6 was amended to allow any reasonable means of humanely dispatching deer that are suffering due to illness or disease and to allow dependent deer to be taken or killed if they have been, or are about to be, deprived of their mother, at any time of the year.

[S.3(2)-(4)of the Deer RRO]

Further action No further action is planned.

B4. Introduce provisions in the Deer Act to permit licensed shooting during the close season, to allow action to be taken for preserving public health and safety (for instance on airfields) or for the purpose of preventing serious damage to any form of property or the natural environment. Licences should only be granted on a case by case basis where necessary and if other reasonable control methods have been found to be ineffective or impracticable. RDS or the new integrated agency is likely to be the licensing authority.

Achievements The Deer Act now has provision for licensing the killing or taking of deer during the close season to prevent deterioration of the natural heritage or to preserve public health and safety. Natural England determines licence applications and is responsible for policy on this licensing.

[S.4 Deer RRO]

Further action No further legislative changes are planned. Natural England will continue to determine applications.

B5. Introduce provisions to permit licensed shooting at night for the purpose of preventing serious damage to any form of property or the natural environment. Licences should only be granted on a case by case basis where necessary, and if other reasonable control methods have been found to be ineffective or are impractical. RDS or the new integrated agency is likely to be the licensing authority.

Achievements The Deer Act now has provision for licensing the killing or taking of deer at night to prevent deterioration of the natural heritage, to preserve public health

and safety or to prevent serious damage to property. Natural England determines licence applications and is responsible for policy on this licensing.

[S.4 Deer RRO]

Further action No further legislative changes planned. Natural England will continue to determine applications.

B6. Move the start of the doe/hind close season in England and Wales to 15 March. This will enhance opportunities for control, and takes account of consultation responses favouring a spring extension over an autumn one.

Achievements Following consultation, the close season for all female deer (except muntjac) is now from 1st April until 31st October, meaning that they can be shot during the months of November to March inclusive. Muntjac have been given no close season because they breed all year round.

[S.5(1) Deer RRO]

Further action No further changes to close seasons for female deer are planned.

B7. Introduce a close season for both sexes of Chinese water deer, from 15 March to 31 October. This will improve the welfare of dependant fawns, but will need to be applied to both sexes since they can be difficult to distinguish.

Achievements Chinese water deer of both sexes have a close season for the first time. The dates are the same as for female deer of the other species (1st April until 31st October).

[S.5(1) Deer RRO]

Further action No further changes to close seasons for Chinese Water deer are planned, assuming there are no specific recommendations from the GB Non-Native Species Programme Board (the NNS Board).

B8. Alter the wording of the legislation so that the close season for both sexes of the parent species apply to hybrid animals.

Achievements This has been done and the term 'species' includes any hybrid of different species of deer. Pure-breds are now protected from killing due to mis-identification as hybrids.

[S.5(4) Deer RRO]

Further action No further changes are planned, assuming there are no specific recommendations from the NNS Board.

B9. Close season for the males of other species and hybrids. Unless explicitly exempted, leave the close season for sika stags unaltered, and ensure red/sika hybrid stags are covered by the same close season as red stags in order to protect red stags which may not be easily distinguished from hybrids in the field.

Achievements This has been done pure-breds are now protected from killing due to mis-identification as hybrids.

[S.5(1) Deer RRO]

Further action No further changes are planned, assuming there are no specific recommendations from the NNS Board.



Sika-red hybrid
(photo J. M. Pemberton)

B10. Consider making it an offence to release Chinese water deer (CWD) into the wild. This could be achieved by adding them to Schedule 9 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.

Achievements	A consultation has been held covering all species which are or ought to be on Schedule 9 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act. The summary of responses was published in May 2009.
Further action	Chinese water deer will be added to Schedule 9 in April 2010.

B11. Consider amending Game Acts to allow the sale of venison throughout the year.

Achievements	This has been done and venison can now be sold all year round, removing the seasonality of availability which was seen as a barrier by some retailers. The most recent anecdotal evidence suggests more English venison is now being sold here rather than exported.
Further action	Regulation of game meat is now incorporated in EU Hygiene Law and therefore no further action is planned to change this legislation.

B12. Consider opportunities to clarify the Deer Act regarding shooting from mechanically propelled vehicles, to make it clear that it is intended to prohibit shooting deer from a vehicle whilst the engine is running, or the vehicle is in motion.

Achievements	This has been done.
Further action	No further action is planned to change the legislation.

[S.2 Deer RRO]

Additional Legal Protection: The Animal Welfare Act became law in 2006 and gives protection to animals under the control of man. This could include wild deer that then come under the control of man. Defra will advise on this legislation when requested.

C. Training and education

High quality training and education are essential for safe, humane and effective management of deer. The Defra family will:

C1. Recognise that voluntary training/learning plays a major role in the training of deer managers/stalkers.

Achievements The Defra network, as part of the DI Partnership, has endorsed the National Occupational Standards (NOS) and recognises the Deer Stalking Certificate as the benchmark for stalker training. All FC Wildlife Rangers are required to achieve this qualification. FC and the DI continue to provide a Director on the Board of Deer Management Qualifications (DMQ Ltd., a 'not for profit' company that administers the awards). DMQ's role is to develop and maintain a progressive approach to deer management training and assessment, linked to the recognised current National Occupational Standards (NOS).

Further action The DI will continue to provide the link between LANTRA (the Sector Skills Council for the environmental and land-based sector) and DMQ, and ensure that Best Practice reflects changes in training and the NOS.

The Partnership should ensure that all deer controllers in partner organisations are qualified to the appropriate standard.

C2. Continue to support the competencies set by LANTRA, as the industry standard.

Achievements The Deer Initiative continues to participate in the LANTRA Game and Wildlife Management Industry Group to ensure the highest standards of competence within the wild deer industry. The DI has been working with LANTRA on a revision of the Occupational Framework and the Sector Skills Agreement.

Further action The DI will continue to work with LANTRA to ensure that the NOS and training match the needs of the industry.

C3. Continue to work with LANTRA in revising National Occupational Standards for game handling.

Achievements The DI drafted the Wild Game Handling Guidance under contract to the Foods Standards Agency (FSA) and participated in the LANTRA Working Group that incorporated the new standards in the NOS.

Further action The DI should continue to work with LANTRA to ensure that the NOS match EU legislation and reflect the needs of the industry.

C4. Explore ways to improve and consolidate standards of assessment for stalkers and deer.

Achievements A Quality Assurance Group (QAG) manages the policy of assessment and changes to the criteria. The DI provides the Chairman of the QAG as an in-kind contribution from the DI to DMQ and provides one of a number of links between DMQ and the Best Practice Working Group. This voluntary industry led qualification has been widely accepted and over 12,000 individuals have now completed the Deer Stalking Certificate (DSC) Level 1 and over 5,000 have completed the DSC Level 2, a practical based assessment of competency.

The DI has produced Best Practice Guidance to support deer management in England and Wales, in particular to make practitioners aware of the procedures that:

- are a legal requirement
- are required to safeguard public safety, food safety and animal welfare
- are required to carry out a task effectively or in a way which may add value.

The web based Guidance will allow practitioners to feel that by following the guidance they are acting humanely, responsibly and effectively. It will also provide information to support rational and considered management based on best current information, provide support to those seeking voluntary and vocational qualifications and contribute to the transparency and accountability of deer managers in both the public and private sector. (See also C1 above.)

Further action DI will continue to work with LANTRA and DMQ. (Also see C1 and references to Best Practice in A1 above.)

C5. Work with the FSA and LANTRA to explore accreditation of assessment to European standards, in the context of meeting the EU hygiene regulations.

Achievements The Foods Standards Agency, as the competent authority, is content that in the context of meeting the EU hygiene regulations the assessments are accredited to EU standards. The NOS have been amended to include recent changes to EU Hygiene legislation and 'Trained Hunter' qualification has been incorporated into the DSC Level 1. The DI produced the initial draft guidance on behalf of the FSA. The FSA are part of the Best Practice Working Group and the Guidance incorporates the relevant advice for practitioners.

Further action DI will maintain ongoing dialogue with FSA to influence and respond to changes in EU hygiene legislation.



Deer impact assessment (photo Arnold Cooke)



*Stalkers in Thetford
(photo: Ed Dyson)*

C6. Require high standards for stalking on public land. (See also section H.)

Achievements All FC Wildlife Management staff have attained the Industry Standards set through the Deer Stalking Certificate Level 1&2. FC operational instructions have been reviewed and revised where necessary to reflect changes in regulation and best practice.

MOD training adheres to industry standards set through DSC Level 1 and 2, mandatory for all MOD deer managers. MOD's Defence Deer Management Procedures are revised annually to ensure they are fully compliant with current legislation and best practice.

Further action Natural England will carry out a National Nature Reserve strategy review and will look to find a mechanism for ensuring adequate recognition of deer and their impacts.

The Defra network and the Ministry of Defence will continue to demand deer management on the public land is carried out in accordance with Industry Standards and Best Practice.

C7. Seek to raise public awareness of the benefits of responsible management of wild deer populations.

Achievements The DI has concentrated on raising awareness at a local level in priority areas. Generic awareness-raising material has been produced which has been used to produce information material as required. Heightened media interest particularly in relation to deer-vehicle collisions has provided a significant number of opportunities for local, regional and national coverage of the issues and the Partnership has developed a communication strategy that ensures that it is able to respond to such opportunities. The DI continues to respond to public enquiries on wild deer on behalf of Defra and the web site and telephone referrals are routinely used to provide information.

Further action The DI will continue to develop its communications and other activities to promote awareness of wild deer management, including through its websites. In addition, links from the Defra helpline and all relevant Government websites will be maintained.

D. Disease control

The evidence available so far suggests that deer are unlikely to be a significant source of spread for the main livestock diseases, although the level of monitoring in deer has been low. Monitoring of deer for bovine TB through statutory submissions is ongoing. There may be an increased risk of TB in wild deer where they are concentrated as a result of supplementary feeding. The level of risk also varies between deer species. Deer are also involved in the transmission of Lyme's disease to humans, although pheasants and small mammals are now thought to be the main reservoirs. The Defra family will:

D1. Produce a strategy for government's involvement in the monitoring and surveillance of diseases in deer.

Achievements The England Wildlife Health Strategy was published in June 2009. It provides a holistic framework for wildlife disease surveillance and management across the Defra network.

The Veterinary Laboratories Agency (VLA) operates a surveillance scheme for wild deer, farmed deer and deer from zoological collections. Deer can be delivered to regional laboratories for a post-mortem examination and disease investigation. Deer are examined at significantly subsidised costs at VLA regional laboratories as part of the national surveillance program. A quarterly report is published on the VLA website.

Further action The VLA scheme will continue.

D2. Ensure that deer issues are included in flexible Disease Contingency plans when necessary.

Achievements The framework provided by the England Wildlife Health Strategy includes such issues.

Further action The Defra network will explore the possibility of mapping the presence, abundance and continued spread of deer species as a tool for the monitoring of and responding to disease and deer management.

D3. Support a new Deer Initiative 'Deer Liaison Officer' in South West England, part of whose role will include a national remit to assist disease surveillance in deer – particularly with regard to bTB.

Achievements A Deer Liaison Officer (DLO) was appointed and has set up increased bTB surveillance and awareness raising in the SW. DI is also facilitating surveillance and increased culling in Cumbria.

In 2005 the DI started a bTB sampling programme on behalf of Defra in the SW of England with support from the Forestry Commission and the National Trust. This work was extended in 2006/7 to include the Cotswolds with the support of local private landowners and the National Gamekeepers Organisation. The work was completed in 2008 and the sampling by both FC and private sector stalkers has produced over 400 viable samples with virtually no samples rejected by the VLA. This was a real success for the DI and its partners, both in terms of training and organisation.

The 2006 FMD outbreak highlighted the growing cooperation between the Deer Initiative and Defra to ensure that contingency plans included the best

evidence of deer distributions, densities and possible behaviour. (Also see A1 above.)

Further action Defra will continue to support a DLO and bTB related activities at the current level. FC will continue to support disease surveillance and research on the Public Forest Estate.

D4. Support the inclusion of carcass inspection as part of stalker assessment through LANTRA, including responsibilities regarding Notifiable Diseases.

Achievements Carcass inspection and disease reporting now forms part of the training and assessment for both the NOS and the DSC and is included in the Best Practice Guidance.

Further action Emerging information on disease recognition will be made available by Defra to the industry through the DI and Best Practice guidance.

D5. Discourage supplementary feeding which may lead to artificial concentrations of wild deer.

Achievements The DI and NE have given advice to this effect where appropriate.

Further action The DI will continue to promote advice to help avoid unintentionally attracting congregations of deer.

D6. Collate information on the regional incidence of Lyme's disease.

Achievements The DI has established working links with the Health Protection Agency and leading academic institutions working in this field. A Best Practice Guide has been produced and information disseminated through the website and the Partnership (including presentations to the DI Conference and local Deer Management Groups).

Further action Research into the role of deer continues. DI will be working in 2009/10 with Liverpool and London Universities and Pirbright to examine over 1000 blood samples for various tick borne diseases

D7. Clarify carcass waste and by-product disposal issues, and disseminate guidance through the Deer Initiative.

Achievements Dialogue on disposal requirements has been started between the DI, Defra and the Environment Agency (EA).

Further action Further discussion with the EA on the Waste Framework regulations are required and planned. Defra will advise on the Animal By-Products Regulations.



Muntjac in autumn (photo Mike Lane)

E. Venison market

Venison sales support deer management activities and form part of the rural economy. The Defra family will:

E1. Clarify the potential for supporting marketing initiatives under the Rural Enterprise Scheme, and seek to ensure that such support is available under successor schemes.

Achievements DI's East of England Deer Forum has commissioned a feasibility study for a region-wide EEDA (RDPE) funded venison processing bid. The DI has also supported local initiatives in the Welsh Marches (see case study on p5) Cumbria, Lincolnshire and Devon, and is currently initiating a feasibility study for local deer marketing in Northamptonshire.

Further action As part of landscape-scale wild deer management the following supply and marketing issues require work:

- venison marketing as well as the provision of chilled storage, processing, and handling facilities will almost certainly encourage the culling of more deer.
- the connection between local producers, processors and the final consumers of venison needs to improve.

A feasibility study funded by NE in the Rockingham Forest area of Northamptonshire will explore the possibility of a local collaborative venison production and processing chain to reduce food miles and promote sustainable wild deer management.

E2. Encourage and support the creation and improvement of deer larders, including encouraging the collaborative use of facilities.

Achievements FC has constructed a modern deer larder in the New Forest to replace three outdated facilities. New larders have been provided at Wyre (FC West Midlands), at Challock and Abbots Wood (FC South East England), Shirehill and Yardley Chase (FC Northants) and at Harwood (FC North East England).

An agreement has been produced to facilitate collaborative use of FC deer larders by the private sector. FC larders have been updated to meet the FC Wild Venison Standard and any shared use must meet this standard.

The Lincolnshire Wild Venison larder is now established (supported by FC funding) and is in shared use, as is the larder at Wyre supporting the 'Grow with Wyre' project. A pilot project for shared facilities is underway as part of the Marches deer project.

The DI has also obtained chiller trailers for use by landowners in priority areas to help supply good quality venison to the market.

Further action The DI is actively exploring other potential locations including Rockingham and the Cotswolds.

The FC programme of larder upgrade is ongoing, including during 2009 a new larder at Grizedale (FC North West England) and extension of the facility at Ludlow (FC West Midlands).

FC will monitor demand from other deer managers for further shared larders and where appropriate facilitate such arrangements.



Carcass handling demonstration, Thetford (photo: Ed Dyson)

NE have agreed to explore the role of Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) and Axis 1 funding under the Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE) where larder provision could be associated with regional projects encouraging employment and training.

E3. Develop the market for wild venison, building on the work of the Countryside Agency's 'Eat the View' initiative.

- Achievements** This scheme was closed when the Countryside Agency was dissolved. Where appropriate, the DI took on this role (see E1 above).
- Further action** NE will explore the role of the RDAs and Axis 1 funding under RDPE (see E2). The DI continues to look for opportunities to promote the development of wild venison markets (see E1, 2 and 4).

E4. Assess the impact of an increased amount of wild venison available for sale in the UK and abroad and the scope for promotion of wild venison in the wider market.

- Achievements** In March 2005 the Agricultural Development Advisory Service (ADAS) produced a report for Defra on this issue 'The impact of a wild deer cull on the venison market in the UK' which included recommendations to promote wild venison alongside farmed venison. Since then research into venison marketing and activities to promote venison markets has continued (see E1, E2 and E3 above).
- Further action** The Defra network and the DI will continue to work with the industry to promote wild venison as a healthy wild product and encourage increased local processing and sales, including through local arrangements.

E5. Work with the FSA on public health and hygiene issues, including EU hygiene regulations.

- Achievements** The DI is actively involved in ensuring that the review of wild game guidance meets the needs of the industry whilst ensuring that high standards of public health and hygiene continue to be prioritised.
- Further action** The DI will continue to be actively involved in ensuring that the review of wild game guidance meets the needs of the industry.

F. Research, evaluation and monitoring

There is a considerable need to develop our understanding of wild deer, and the best methods of management for a sustainable population. The Defra family will:

F1. Work with the Highways Agency and the Deer Initiative, to continue with their research and ongoing monitoring of Road Traffic Accidents involving deer.

Achievements The DI continues to monitor DVCs on behalf of the Highways Agency. As of December 2008, the DI DVC database holds information on over 40,000 deer road casualties and related vehicle collisions in the UK; of these over 32,000 records relate to England, about 7,500 to Scotland and close to 500 for Wales.

Deer Collisions Website: the DI maintains a website www.deercollisions.co.uk to allow direct DVC recording by the public, and as a means of raising awareness. We are convinced that areas of high frequency of DVCs are not simply related in any direct way to deer density. Higher than average levels of DVCs at the landscape scale are determined not by large deer populations alone, but by the co-location of high deer numbers, high density of roads and high traffic volume. The greatest frequencies of DVCs reported to date are mostly located within those regions of the country where traffic flows are largest.

The work is summarised in 'Deer on our roads – Counting the Cost' available at www.thedeerinitiative.co.uk

Further action DI has agreed with HA that future work will include continued maintenance and development of the DVC database, as well as a programme to raise driver awareness and research into other mitigation measures (see also F3 below).

F2. Continue research into current deer management techniques.

Achievements The Deer Research Working Group (DRWG) has been set up to ensure continuity and a consistent approach to deer research commissioned by Government and



Roe deer road casualty (photo Colin Shedden)

beyond. The DRWG is facilitated by the DI and now brings together Government and NGO commissioners of deer research. It is chaired by Defra. The aims of the Group are:

- To identify and set priorities for future research requirements.
- To encourage funding partnerships and explore opportunities for synergies.
- To outline an agreed timetable for commissioning new research.
- To exchange information about recent research on deer.

Recent priorities have included:

- Standardising biodiversity impact assessments
- Identifying and mapping deer distribution and densities
- Identifying novel innovative methods of reducing DVCs

FC research programmes included 'Impacts of herbivores' and 'Protection of Woodland Ecosystems against mammals'.

Further action The Deer Research Working Group will continue to operate and both Government and the industry will wherever possible look for collaborative research opportunities to address the priorities.

F3. Explore measures which minimise or mitigate the impact of deer, including woodland planning, highway design and roadside planting.

Achievements For the mitigation of DVCs, a number of new technologies have recently been developed including new types of acoustic reflectors, rumble strips and novel types of animal or speed activated signage. For the last three years the DI has been carrying out a number of practical trials in England to evaluate some of these newer forms of deterrent.

Driver awareness: some time ago the DI Partnership agreed that a priority was to identify ways of influencing driver behaviour. We have set up a DVC Awareness Working Group to do this, chaired by Professor David Macdonald (Founder-Director of WildCRU, the Oxford University Wildlife Conservation Research Unit).

Further action DI has agreed with HA that future work will focus on:

- Usage of new accommodation structures (road and foot bridges, and underpasses)
- Raising driver awareness through the new **DeerAware** programme
- Maintenance of the DVC database

The work so far has focused on trunk roads and motorways but there is a need for DfT and local authorities to be more engaged in the issue of deer on our roads. Details on **DeerAware** will be available from the website: www.deeraware.co.uk

F4. Explore the opportunities presented by novel research techniques such as immuno-contraception.

Achievements Defra has continued to fund a concept study of an immuno-contraceptive vaccine in wild boar (Project WM036). Proof of concept for large mammals (feral wild boar) has been demonstrated.

Further action The follow-on Defra research project (WM0408) will assess, via field trials, immuno-contraceptives in free-living wild boar and urban badgers, and the development of oral baits and delivery systems. Results are due in 2011 and Defra

will then assess whether the technology has developed sufficiently to be tested on deer.

F5. Continue with present research into non-lethal methods, and be receptive to future initiatives. Defra recognises that novel non-lethal methods can be a valuable addition to lethal methods but are unlikely to replace them, in many situations.

Achievements Immuno-contraception work has been covered above (F4). The DI and Highways agency have looked at various non-lethal methods of reducing DVCs (see F3 for details).

Further action In many cases non-lethal methods of resolving problems seem to be ineffective, not cost-effective, or at best of limited use. However the Defra network will continue to consider those with promise, including immuno-contraception (F4), and green bridges (F3). The Defra network acknowledge that with the current techniques available deer management in the short term is likely to rely heavily on lethal control and so further development of lethal controls alongside development of non-lethal controls will not be discounted.

The Deer Research Working Group will continue to be open to suggestions of investigating novel methods.

F6. Commission a study into the effectiveness of deer management groups to inform best practice guidance.

Achievements The DI worked closely with the Research Councils' Rural Economy and Land Use (RELU) programme, on a project to produce a framework for the development of effective, informed and inclusive collaborative management to promote rural sustainability, using wild deer in Britain as a case study.

The project consists of the following:

By engaging actively at a national and local level with organisations and individuals with an interest in deer, the project aims to understand the causes behind some of the conflicts that exist in deer management and the extent to which these conflicts may be reduced by collaboration between different stakeholders. Other activities include a survey of management practices and its knowledge base using Participatory Geographical Information Systems (PGIS), workshops to assess public attitudes towards deer and their impacts, and choice experiments with stakeholders to study the acceptable costs of deer management.

FC have also commissioned a study of the most effective arrangements for deer management projects: looking at equipment provision, collaborative culling, shared facilities etc and associated contract and user guidance.

The project team is made up of researchers from the Macaulay Institute, Forest Research and the Universities of Aberdeen, York, Edinburgh, Kent and St Andrews. RELU is funded jointly by the Research Councils, Defra and the Scottish Executive Environment and Rural Affairs Department with additional support from the Forestry Commission. The project is due to report in 2009.

Further action The RELU research will be completed and made available on the DI website. The results will be published and the DI will include relevant findings in the Best Practice Guidance so practitioners can work more effectively together.

F7. Continue and develop current work assessing the impact of deer on woodlands, taking opportunities provided by the National Inventory of Woods and Trees, and Farm Environment Plans.

- Achievements** Such research forms part of the FC research programme 'Impacts of Herbivores' (£214K in 2005/06).
- Further action** FC will continue to fund the assessment of the impact of deer on woodland birds as part of its commitment to PSA28 (to 'secure a healthy natural environment for today and the future' – a Defra lead). The National Inventory of Woodland and Trees conducted by the FC has been re-named as the National Forest Inventory. A new five year programme of surveys will collect and present wide ranging data including an assessment of browsing impacts.

F8. Encourage and support regional and local studies into the impacts of deer (see Regional Strategies below).

- Achievements** A number of MSc projects supported by the DI are looking at deer browsing in East England, South East England and the West Midlands. Forest Research has been commissioned to examine deer impacts in woodland SSSIs in the priority areas. The report presents the results of the first assessment, summarised for each region and location.
- MOD currently supports a number of large scale research projects which consider the effects of deer management on the landscape as a whole.
- We are committed to producing the best possible evidence on deer impacts and the effect that improved management has in reducing them. Ongoing surveys are therefore being undertaken throughout the regions to provide updated data on deer abundance, distribution, population density and impact in priority areas.
- Further action** Since the Forest Research survey was designed to enable future changes to be detected, it is intended to repeat it across the same sites once sufficient funding has been secured, after which comparative analyses will be undertaken to test for significant trends.

F9. Commission a study into the impacts of deer on woodland biodiversity values.

- Achievements** Such research forms part of the FC research programme 'Impacts of Herbivores'. A new collaborative study has been discussed with potential partners.
- A team from the University of East Anglia (UEA), working with Forestry Commission Rangers and the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) and supported by the St Huberts Club, are carrying out a research project to examine the effectiveness of landscape scale deer management and the consequence of this for biodiversity, including woodland birds. Thermal imaging, transects and dung counting were used to estimate deer densities as a baseline. A follow-up bird census by BTO, and habitat surveys by UEA, will enable us to relate deer density to woodland condition.
- Further action** Monitoring of bird community responses to targeted woodland management grant and associated deer management activity will contribute to our understanding of woodland bird communities and deer impact.

G. Linking grants to sustainable deer management

The Defra family will:

G1. Continue to support effective woodland management through their grant schemes, where deer are preventing the establishment of new woodland or adversely impacting on existing woodland.

Achievements Woodland grant and support for deer management activity continue to be closely integrated at the site level. Landscape scale deer and woodland management projects have been established in many areas and are recognised as being effective.

Further action To address the future requirements of PSA28 and other policy objectives, extensions of existing and new landscape scale deer management projects will be considered, especially in priority areas.

G2. In particular, payments may be made through the Forestry Commission's English Woodland Grant Scheme (EWGS) for effective deer management under the Woodland Management Grant and Woodland Improvement Grant components.

Achievements This is now an integral part of EWGS.

Further action The rollout of these grants schemes and associated support for deer management will be continued to new owners particularly in identified priority areas.



Red deer (photo Mike Lane)

H. Management of public estate land

The Government is a significant landowner, and intends to continue to take the lead in best practice. The Defra family will:

H1. Continue to manage deer populations on public land at sustainable levels, ensuring best practice at all times.

Achievements	<p>FC continues to manage deer to achieve sustainable land management objectives. Deer management is examined as a fundamental part of audit of the Public Forest Estate against the UK Woodland Assurance Standard. Venison produced by the FC under its Wild Venison Standard carries the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certification label. FC has contributed to the production of the DI Partnership Best Practice guidance and ensures it is included in all operational guidance and instructions and in individual skills assessment.</p> <p>MOD deer management is consistent with wider Government sustainable development policy and targets. Sustainable deer management contributes to local MOD estate management objectives and forms a key part of each site's integrated rural management plan.</p>
Further action	<p>Where members of the Defra network and the MOD manage deer, they will continue to achieve sustainable land management objectives and demonstrate Best Practice standards.</p>

H2. Continue to support and act as a catalyst for landscape scale collaborative deer management through Forestry Commission staff.

Achievements	<p>Forestry Commission staff been closely involved with a range of collaborative deer management initiatives, and have for example been instrumental in facilitating the establishment of the Lincolnshire Deer Management Group. The MOD sits on and plays a key role in a number of landscape-scale deer management groups.</p>
Further action	<p>The Forestry Commission will continue to collaborate with neighbouring landowners and where appropriate take a lead in establishing landscape-scale collaborative deer management. The MOD will also continue to support this landscape-scale approach.</p>



*Red deer
(photo Graham
Downing)*

I. Regional and local strategies

The assessment of sustainable deer population levels can only be made at regional and local levels, looking at the landscape in a holistic way. Where there is evidence of unsustainable deer populations, the Defra family will, mainly through the Deer Initiative:

11. Encourage, facilitate and support the development of regional and local deer management strategies.

Achievements

In the East of England the DI has established a pilot wild deer forum which brings together stakeholders who have a role to play in the delivery of a sustainable wild deer population. The Forum acts as a networking, co-ordinating and supporting group for the Eastern Region Deer Strategy and promotes:

- responsible deer management.
- enhancement of the environment for other flora and fauna.
- awareness of sustainable deer management to the public.

In order for the Deer Initiative to effectively deliver advice and tailor it to regional needs it was felt that as well as a national overview, local Deer Liaison Officers (DLOs) were also needed. Government funding has allowed the DI to establish a regional structure and changes to the Head Office including a GIS specialist on secondment from NE. By December 2008, 4 Regional DLOs were in place in England (covering the East, Central, South East, and South West Regions). The DLOs provide a regional focus for deer advice and deliver collaborative management in priority areas (*see map*) that have been identified by Natural England, the Forestry Commission and the Deer Initiative. The DI Regional DLOs support a network of Deer Management Groups and other collaborative deer management projects which are focussed on the protection and enhancement of designated sites, reducing deer vehicle collisions and increasing disease surveillance.

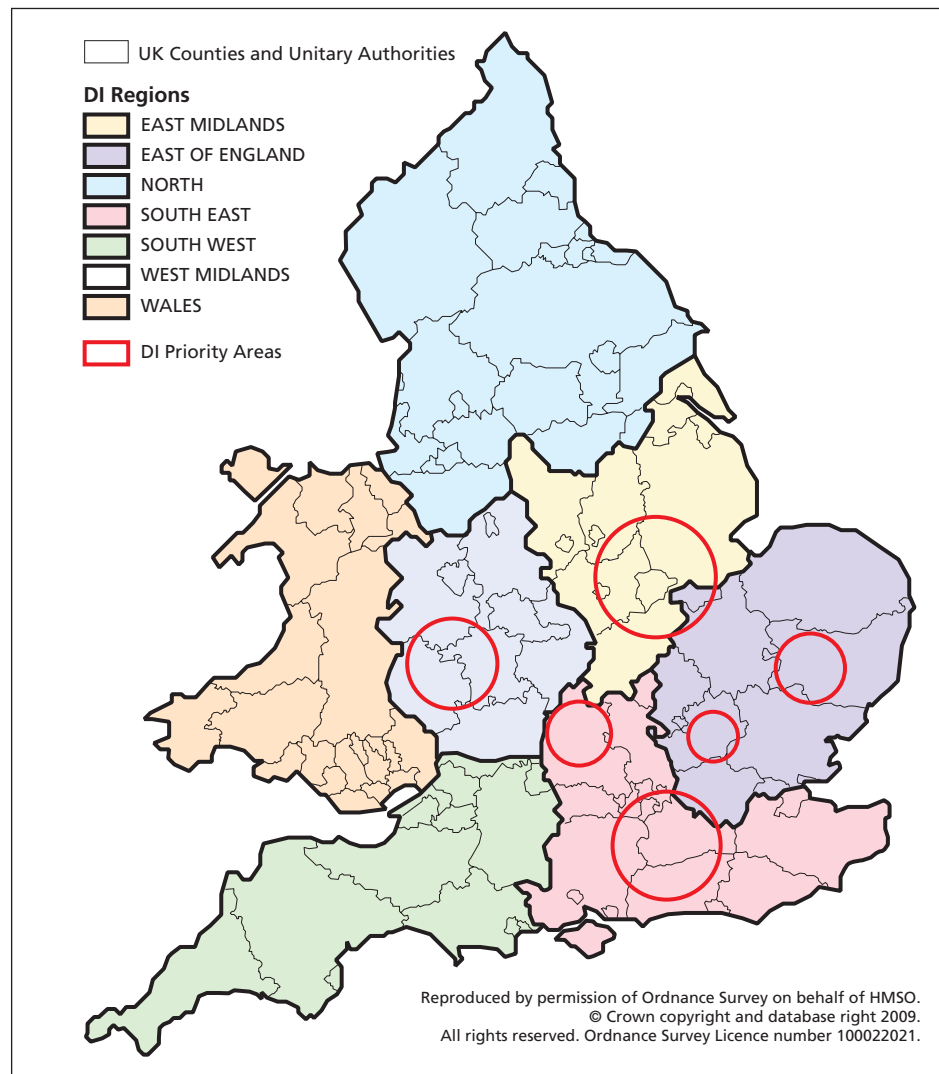
This approach is best illustrated by the SSSI improvement programme. In 2005, of the 22,000ha of woodland SSSI in England in unfavourable condition, 8,000ha (36%) was unfavourable as a result of damage by deer. By 2008, this figure had dropped to 4,000ha (22% of woodland in unfavourable condition), a significant reduction that is largely a result of regional activity, such as the Marches project in the Welsh Borders, led by the Deer Initiative.

The Forestry Commission has produced Regional Forestry Frameworks which support the production of action plans for wild deer where appropriate, and in addition has developed regional strategies for the management of deer on the Public Forest Estate.

Further action

The Defra network and the DI will encourage and facilitate the development of regional sustainable deer management strategies. Following the success of the East of England Deer Forum, the DI is working with the NW Association of Deer Management Groups to establish a Deer Forum with the eventual aim of producing a wild deer strategy for the NW of England. The DI is also working with a number of regional bodies such as the Exmoor National Park and the Cotswolds AONB to produce sustainable deer management strategies within their designated areas.

Natural England will ensure early identification of other designated sites at risk as a result of deer impacts and in collaboration with the DI and FC will put in place action to protect these sites. NE in collaboration with DI and FC will put in



place action to improve these SSSIs in the longer term.

The Government is committing additional funding for the period through until March 2011 to support improvements in SSSI condition through regional deer projects. FC is working with neighbours in order to deliver the SSSI projects including support to local collaborative deer management with funding and in-kind support and will continue to do so.

The Defra network and the DI will continue to support the protection of vulnerable sites to prevent any decline in the condition achieved under the 2010 targets. Our aim is to maintain the momentum gained by the injection of the targeted funding for SSSIs. The DI will lead a targeted programme of outreach seminars using Best Practice as a vehicle for raising awareness of landowners, land managers and conservation bodies.

12. Encourage as broad a partnership involvement as possible in the preparation of these strategies and action plans.

Achievements The DI has succeeded in bringing together partnerships at both national and regional levels. A number of organisations such as the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds are fully committed to the work at a local level but have yet to formally join the Partnership.

Further action The DI will continue to explore opportunities to broaden the Partnership to increase engagement and potentially expand the funding base.

J. Implementing and reporting progress

The Defra family organisations are committed to taking forward these actions over the next three years and will:

J1. Continue to fund the core costs of the Deer Initiative (DI) for a further three years, directed through the land management departments and agencies (Defra, Forestry Commission, and English Nature), reflecting the conservation, forestry and agricultural benefits of sustainable deer management.

Achievements The Defra family have provided this funding which in turn allowed the DI to be instrumental in many of the achievements described in this review.

Further action The Defra family will continue to fund the DI. (Also see J2 below.)

J2. Funding to the DI will be increased, to ensure that full-time Deer Liaison Officers can be provided in at least three regions of England.

Achievements This was achieved in the 2005 to 2008 period and additional funding has allowed a 4th DLO to be appointed. This regional structure enables the Deer Initiative to maintain a strategic overview and at the same time be on hand to offer management advice and other support where it is needed. Training, awareness and outreach events, and facilitating the development of Deer Management Groups are a major part of the DLOs' work to involve stakeholders and build deer management capacity. The DLOs also play key roles in developing expertise and running projects of national significance, including disease surveillance, DVCs and Best Practice guidance.

Further action In order to retain expertise and capitalise on the trust and relationships developed by the DLOs and their local land/deer managers, these posts would benefit from a commitment to long term sustainable funding. The Defra network will discuss with the DI how this might be achieved.

J3. In addition the Defra family will prepare short annual statements on progress to the Deer Initiative Partnership and seek their advice on how best to take the Action Plan forward.

Achievements It was decided to forego the production of annual statements in favour of regular reviews of progress at the twice-yearly DI Partnership meetings.

Further action The twice-yearly DI Partnership meetings will continue to review progress on activities related to the action plan.

4. Summary of action to March 2011 (including action taken since 2008)

DI: Deer Initiative NE: Natural England FC: Forestry Commission MOD: Ministry of Defence HA: Highways Agency
 AH: Animal Health Agency VLA: Veterinary Laboratories Agency EA: Environment Agency FR: Forest Research
 DMQ: Deer Management Qualifications Ltd LANTRA: the Sector Skills Council for environmental and land-based industries

A Ensuring high quality co-ordinated service

		<i>Timing</i>	<i>Lead responsibility</i>	<i>Remarks</i>
A1	<i>The Deer Initiative</i>			
	Contribute to the conservation and sustainable management of woodlands and other habitats.	ongoing	DI	
	Help tackle deer-vehicle collisions on our roads	ongoing	DI	
	Build capacity on animal health issues relating to deer	ongoing	DI	
	Ensure Best Practice guides remain up to date	ongoing	DI	
	Disseminate knowledge of Best Practice (outreach seminars)	to Mar 2011	DI	
	Review awareness of Best Practice in 2011	to Mar 2011	DI	
A2	<i>Defra: native and non-native species policy</i>			
	Consider whether any of the non-native species of deer need specific strategies	2009-10	Defra, NE	
A3	<i>Defra Veterinary services: disease, animal welfare</i>			
	Advise on legislation and policy	ongoing	Defra, AH, VLA	
	Consider amending Foot-and-Mouth Disease (England) Order 2006	2009-10	Defra	
	Advise landowners on wild deer in bovine TB hotspots	ongoing	DI	
A4	<i>Forestry Commission: woodland deer management</i>			
	Support courses and training for deer management	ongoing	FC	
A5	<i>Natural England will advise on biodiversity generally, but particularly with respect to Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs)</i>			
	Continue SSSI woodland training to staff. Advice at site level continues via Advisors	ongoing	NE	
A6	<i>Natural England will provide advice on legal methods of both resolving and avoiding deer problems. They will advise Defra on statutory issues relating to notices under the Agriculture Act 1947, and licences under the proposed new provisions in the legislation</i>			
	Assess licence applications and provide advice on deer problems	ongoing	NE	
	Where necessary NE will advise Defra on statutory issues relating to notices under the Agriculture Act 1947 (although use of this Act will be limited).	ongoing	NE	

B Improving the laws on deer

(all achieved and no further action planned except for B10 below)

B10	<i>Consider making it an offence to release Chinese water deer into the wild</i>			
	CWD to be added to Schedule 9 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981	Apr 2010	Defra	

C Training and education

		Timing	Lead responsibility	Remarks
C1	Recognise that voluntary training/learning plays a major role in the training of deer managers/stalkers			
	Provide link between LANTRA and DMQ and ensure Best Practice reflects changes in training or NOS.	ongoing	DI	
	Ensure that deer managers in partner organisations are qualified to the appropriate standard	ongoing	DI Partner organisations	
C2	Support the competencies set by LANTRA as the industry standard			
	Work with LANTRA to ensure the NOS and training meet the needs of the industry	ongoing	DI	
C3	Continue to work with LANTRA in revising National Occupational Standards for game handling			
	Work with LANTRA to ensure the NOS match EU legislation and industry needs	ongoing	DI	
C4	Explore ways to improve and consolidate standards of assessment for stalkers			
	Work with LANTRA and DMQ	ongoing	DI	(also see A1 and C1 above)
C5	Work with the FSA and LANTRA to explore accreditation of assessment to European standards, in the context of EU hygiene regulations			
	Maintain dialogue with FSA to influence and respond to changes in EU hygiene legislation.	ongoing	DI	
C6	Require high standards for stalking on public land			
	Ensure that deer management on the public land is in accordance with industry standards and Best Practice.	ongoing	Defra family, MOD	
	Review of National Nature Reserves will consider mechanism to address deer and impacts.	2010-11	NE	
C7	Seek to raise public awareness of the benefits of responsible management of wild deer populations			
	DI will promote awareness of wild deer management, including through websites.	ongoing	DI	
	Maintain the link from the Defra helpline and all relevant Government websites	ongoing	DI, Defra family	

D Disease control

D1	Produce a strategy for Government's involvement in the monitoring and surveillance of deer			
	England Wildlife Health Strategy published	15/06/09	Defra	
	VLA surveillance scheme to continue	ongoing	AH/VLA	
D2	Ensure that deer issues are included in flexible disease contingency plans when necessary			
	Explore the possibility of mapping the distribution of deer species to aid monitoring of and responding to disease.	2009-10	Defra, FC, NE, DI	
D3	Support a new Deer Initiative 'Deer Liaison Officer' in South West England (to include national deer surveillance in deer)			
	Support the DI and bTB related activities at the current level	ongoing	Defra	
	Support disease surveillance and research on the Public Forest Estate	ongoing	FC	
D4	Support the inclusion of carcass inspection as part of stalker assessment through LANTRA			
	Emerging information on disease recognition to be made available by Defra via the DI Partnership and BP guidance	ongoing	Defra, AH, DI	
D5	Discourage supplementary feeding which may lead to artificial concentrations of wild deer			
	DI to continue to provide advice	ongoing	DI	
D6	Collate information on the regional incidence of Lyme's disease			
	Research to continue into the role of deer (inc. 2009/20 joint sampling project)	ongoing	DI	
D7	Clarify carcass waste and by-product disposal issues and disseminate guidance through the Deer Initiative			
	Clarify the Waste Framework regulations with EA	2009	DI, EA	
	Defra to advise on Animal by-products Regulations	ongoing	Defra	

		Timing	Lead responsibility	Remarks
E	Venison market			
E1	Clarify the potential for supporting marketing initiatives under the Rural Enterprise Scheme and successor schemes			
	Feasibility studies in Rockingham Forest (NE funded) and in the East of England (DI) to explore potential.	2009-10	DI	
E2	Support the creation and improvement of deer larders and the collaborative use of facilities			
	Explore further potential locations for deer larders (including Rockingham and the Cotswolds).	ongoing	DI	2010-11 funding under discussion
	Explore the role of the RDAs and Axis 1 funding under RDPE	ongoing	NE	
	Monitor demand from private sector for further shared larders, and facilitate where appropriate	ongoing	FC	
E3	Develop the market for wild venison, building on the Countryside Agency's 'Eat the View' initiative			
	Explore opportunities including for regional funding (as in E2 above).	ongoing	NE, DI	
E4	Assess the impact of an increased amount of wild venison available for sale in the UK and abroad, and scope for wider market			
	Government will continue to work with the industry to promote wild venison and local processing and sales.	ongoing	Defra family, DI	
E5	Work with the FSA on public health and hygiene issues (including EU hygiene regulation)			
	Ensure that the review of wild game guidance meets the needs of the industry	ongoing	DI	
F	Research, evaluation and monitoring			
F1	Continue with research and monitoring of road traffic accidents involving deer			
	Raise driver awareness; launch of DeerAware publicity material in September 2009.	2009-10	HA, DI	
	Look into using new structures such as road/foot bridges and underpasses	2009-10	HA, DI	
	Maintain the DVC database	ongoing	HA, DI	
F2	Continue research into current deer management techniques			
	Deer Research Working Group to continue to operate, and both Government and industry will seek opportunities for collaborative research to address the priorities	ongoing	DI	
F3	Explore measures which minimise or mitigate the impact of deer including woodland planning and highway design			
	(see F1 above)			
F4	Explore the opportunities presented by novel research techniques such as immuno-contraception			
	Assess Defra research project on boars and badgers	2011	Defra, DI	Due to report in 2011 and may have potential for testing in deer
F5	Continue to explore non-lethal methods of control			
	Continue to consider those with promise, such as immuno-contraception (F4) and green bridges (F1)	ongoing	Defra family, DI	
	Remain open to further development of lethal controls	ongoing		
	The Deer Research Working Group will continue to be open to suggestions of investigating novel methods	ongoing	DI	
F6	Commission a study into the effectiveness of deer management groups to inform Best Practice guidance			
	RELU project findings to be publicised via a conference	2009-10		
	RELU project to be made available on the DI website and where appropriate included in Best Practice guidance	2009-10	DI	
F7	Continue and develop current work, assessing the impact of deer on woodlands			
	A new five year programme of surveys will include assessment of browsing impacts.	ongoing	FC	
	FC will continue to fund the assessment of the impact of deer on woodland birds.	ongoing	FC	

		Timing	Lead responsibility	Remarks
F8	Encourage and support regional and local studies into the impacts of deer (see regional strategies below)			
	FR survey to be repeated across the same sites in 2009, comparative analysis will test for trends	2009	FR	
F9	Commission a study into the impacts of deer on woodland biodiversity values			
	Continue monitoring of bird community responses to woodland management grant and associated deer management.	ongoing	FC	

G Linking grants to sustainable deer management

G1	The Defra family will continue to support effective woodland management through their grant schemes where deer are preventing the establishment of new woodland or adversely impacting on existing woodland			
	Extensions of existing and new landscape scale deer management projects will be considered, especially for priority areas.	ongoing	FC, NE	
G2	In particular payments may be made through the Forestry Commission's EWGS for effective deer management			
	Rollout of support for deer management will be continued to new owners, particularly in identified priority areas.	ongoing	FC	

H Management of public estate land

H1	Continue to manage deer populations on public land at sustainable levels, ensuring best practice at all times			
	Achieve sustainable land management objectives and ensure adherence to Best Practice guidance	ongoing	Defra family MOD	
H2	Continue to support and act as catalyst for landscape-scale collaborative deer management through Forestry Commission staff			
	Collaborate with neighbouring landowners and where appropriate take a lead in establishing landscape scale collaborative deer management	ongoing	FC	

I Regional and local strategies

I1	Support the development of regional and local deer management strategies			
	Encourage and facilitate the development of regional deer management strategies	ongoing	Defra family, DI	
	Ensure early identification of other designated sites at risk from deer impacts, and with DI and FC, act to protect them	ongoing	NE	
	Support the protection of vulnerable sites to prevent decline in condition	ongoing	Defra family, DI	
	Lead a targeted programme of outreach seminars, using Best Practice to raise awareness of landowners, land managers and conservation bodies	to 2011	DI	
I2	Encourage as broad a partnership involvement as possible in the preparation of regional/local strategies and action plans			
	Explore opportunities to broaden the Partnership to increase engagement and the funding base	ongoing	DI	

J Implementing and reporting progress

J1	Continue to fund the core costs of the Deer Initiative (to March 2011)			
	Continue to provide core funding to DI	to Mar 2011	Defra, NE, FC	
J2	Funding to the DI for full time Deer Liaison Officers			
	To retain expertise and capitalise on the trust and relationships developed by the DLOs and their local land/deer managers, these posts would benefit from a commitment to long term sustainable funding. The Defra network will discuss with the DI how this might be achieved		Defra network, DI	
J4	The Defra network will continue to assess progress			
	Review the action plan in March 2011	Mar 2011	Defra, FC	



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The Deer Initiative is a broad partnership of statutory, voluntary and private interests dedicated to 'the achievement and maintenance of a sustainable and healthy population of wild deer in England and Wales'.