

BRANCH NEWS

North Eastern England Branch

Regulatory Special Edition:

- Deer as Data Management
- Scotland is getting closer
- 'Now Wash Your Hands'
- The Men from the Ministry

The Branch is picking up speed. Our recent speaker evening with Richard Playfair of LDNS was a major success, in the high turnout of members and the quality of the discussion. We welcome Glen Graham, the Ranger at Wallington Hall, and thank him for his involvement to date. We also welcome staff members from Northumberland College. David Stewart has delivered excellent work for the Branch thus far, not least in his lecture to Houghall students in February. I thank those members who are taking the initiative to find private range facilities for the Branch and those who have offered to be RCOs. There are others to thank too. We are making further contacts in the deer management sector. We are pushing ahead with our Muntjac conference, set for 21st September 2018. This will provide a focus for stakeholders across the region, including BDS Branches. Steve Hyde has done sterling work here. There are also important regulatory issues that we must engage with, and are. This means that stalkers must develop different skills. This newsletter examines those regulatory issues.

Christopher Roy-Toole Branch Chairman

Deer Management is Data Management. David Stewart writes:

I started my unconventional conservation career as an enthusiastic but unqualified countryside manager in the early 1970's. So I was eager, if not a little nervous, to take up the Chairman's invitation to talk to students at Houghall College on the Level 3 City and Guilds Deer Management module. The group varied in age and experience, with views that ranged from those of an active deer manager to those of a preservationist. The point is that these people in their future professional lives may be deciding, commissioning and overseeing the work that we do as deer managers. I wanted to help the students understand some of the deer management issues that we face. It struck me that these students held particularly passionate views. The module and our presentation had a common aim: to train the students to set aside their opinions and to make decisions based on sound science, careful thought, and with clear objectives. There may be a lesson here for us as deer managers: how many of us routinely gather and record information on deer impact to bring to our discussions with landowner/occupiers about our cull? Do we hold comprehensive historic records of deer activity that we have witnessed on our ground? Are we clear about the land management objectives of our owner/occupier? Maybe we should aspire to be more like the Victorian naturalist with their wonderful nature notes.

Our evening with Lowland Deer Network Scotland, 13th March 2018

Richard Playfair of LDNS proved to be one of our best speakers in years. We thank Kirkley Hall Campus for their facilities. Some striking points came out of our discussion with him:

- There is a lack of consistency between Scottish local authorities in approaches to deer management.
- Lack of data on deer in Lowland Scotland points to the need for more deer counts. Private forest is probably sheltering most of the Roe Doe population.
- Gaps in deer data can impact the traceability of venison in the food chain: *if we only know about 50% of the Roe Deer population then where is the other 50% of the Roe cull going?*
- Foods Standards Scotland is actively monitoring the venison industry and will take action in the face of non-compliance.
- EU Food Hygiene Regulations exempt "direct supply" in "small quantities" to "local retailers". This raises logistic and hygiene issues because "local" in Scotland can denote very large distances. The lack of larder facilities in Lowland Scotland poses a problem as it does in our Branch area.
- LDNS are involved in separate pilot studies on management of peri-urban deer and local butcher chains.
- Reluctance on the part of a local authority to issue venison dealer's licences impacts the viability of a supply chain. If licences were issued more readily then there would be more operators to supply records for inspection and this would raise standards in the industry, says Richard.
- *He suggests that, in future, Lowland deer groups could be clustered around access to a larder rather than a discrete deer population.*
- Achieving a workable local venison supply chain is a key issue for us all. There is a need for dialogue between LDNS and deer groups in England on these and other matters.

Food Standards Agency “Regulating our Future”

<https://www.food.gov.uk/enforcement/regulation/regulating-our-future>

- FSA are steering towards a new regulatory approach to the food sector.
- FSA seeks risk-adapted regulation, targeted to food business operators according to the risk that they pose.
- FSA aims to replace manual records with digital records and ‘Cloud’ reporting to enable faster risk targeting.
- Operators who can demonstrate effective self-regulation should expect to be treated accordingly.
- *Will supply of venison in small quantity direct to consumer or local retailer retain its exempt status?*
- *Consider the impact on the sector of one stalker who puts contaminated venison into the local supply chain.*

“The Countryside at a Crossroads” : House of Lords Select Committee Report on the future of Defra

<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201719/ldselect/ldnerc/99/99.pdf>

- Recommend a new independent oversight body to hold the Government to account on environmental matters.
- Recommend that responsibility for Rural Affairs transfer from Defra to Communities and Local Government.
- Recommend that Natural England be strengthened in its authority, capacity, funding and independent voice.
- Recommend that Natural England develop new collaborative ways of working to deliver Conservation 21.
- Recommend that public bodies have a legal duty to report what they do to conserve biodiversity.
- *If Natural England is ‘beefed up’, what are the implications for deer management?*
- *What sort of new collaborative working can we expect or want in deer management?*
- *If public authorities must report on conserving biodiversity, must deer managers and stalkers do the same?*

And finally,

This is not all about deer stalkers getting ‘their collars felt’. Although it might be. Deer Stalking and Deer Management are going to become more professional and more regulated. If the sector doesn’t want to be regulated from the Top, then it needs to regulate itself from the Base. That is all about stalkers thinking about what they need to do in the longer term to stay in the field, getting the skills, and managing themselves even more than the Deer.

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