

## **British Deer Society Research Strategy**

*Working to enable the deer of the United Kingdom to exist in harmony with today's environment and to ensure that their future is secure for generations to come.*

BDS believes that if wild deer management is based upon sound scientific principles, it will encourage the co-existence of wild deer populations in balance with farming, forestry, public access and other land uses and also safeguard the health and welfare of the deer themselves. We undertake and fund pure and applied research projects aiming to scientifically explore and understand deer, and the issues they bring for people. Particular topics may be favoured from time to time. These will be listed on the research pages of the BDS website.

### **The research framework**

The Society's research framework provides a robust structure for procuring research in pursuance of its core objectives. In all cases, the process involves receipt of an application or proposal for research funding, appraisal of the application by the Research Committee, recommendation by the Research Committee to the Society's Board of Trustees, approval/refusal of the application by the Board, payment of funds, and progress and final reporting.

The components of the research framework should be considered when applying for research funding. They are as follows:

**Application form** – All applications for research funding, whether for a grant or a research contract (see below) must be made on the Society's application form. Applications made on anything other than the application form will not be considered.

Applications that clearly specify the research question/hypothesis and convince the committee that the methods and approach will achieve this, leading to results that can be disseminated to academic, policy and practitioner audiences, will be favoured.

**Research Committee** – The Committee is the primary vehicle through which all advice on research funding will be made available. The Committee comprises three Trustee Directors, and the Honorary Scientific Advisor, supported by the Honorary Veterinary Advisor and a group of independent peer reviewers, all of whom are researchers with established reputations in their own field of specialism.

**Priorities** – Traditionally, the Society has funded research within the natural sciences (mainly biology). However, as research becomes increasingly multi- and inter-disciplinary, we will fund a wide range of disciplines, including social sciences and humanities.

Priorities for research fulfil two objectives: Firstly, they encourage research that aligns with the Society's objectives. Secondly, they meet current Society policy needs. However, these objectives do not preclude applications seeking funding for support of projects that do not meet them, but which are otherwise within the remit and/or interests of the Society. Therefore, we have two tiers of priorities:

*Policy requirements* – these are determined by current needs of Society policy. These needs will be met by the offer of a research contract by open tender or to a limited number of potential contractors.

*Fundamental themes* – these are broad and focussed on the Society's objectives. Currently, they include:

- Deer impact on the environment and human interests
- Impact of humans on deer including welfare and disturbance
- The role of deer in livestock and human diseases
- Urban deer: problems caused and problems associated with management
- Novel methods of controlling impacts of deer
- Ways of improving the welfare impacts of culling wild deer
- Responses of deer and their habitat to climate change
- Research to help combat wildlife crime
- The community carrying capacity of deer

Funding of research into *fundamental themes* and other topics is available under the three categories below.

**Categories** – Researchers can apply for funding under three categories of support:

*Small grants* of up to £3000 are available for projects of up to 12 months duration. Such grants can support delivery of research by amateur volunteers or professional researchers whose salaries are covered elsewhere. Funds can cover consumables, equipment, travel and subsistence, but not salaries, wages or stipends.

*Support grants* of up to £5000 per year for up to 3 years. Grants may cover consumables, equipment, travel and subsistence, and may be suitable for supplementary support of research funded by additional supporters and including expeditions that include a significant component of deer research.

*Student support grants* of up to £7500 per year for up to 2 years for MSc by research or MPhil and up to 3 years for PhD. All costs associated with the project are eligible for support, including stipend. However, the maximum amount is unlikely to cover all annual costs of a studentship, so additional financial support will need to be demonstrated to qualify for support from the Society.

In all cases, equipment purchased using a BDS grant will remain the property of the Society unless agreed otherwise by the Board in writing.

**Peer-review and Decision process** – Applications must be submitted to the General Manager at BDS Fordingbridge Office, and from there sent to the Research Committee. Trustee Directors on the Committee will appraise proposals against Society priorities and charitable objectives. The Scientific Advisor, supported by selected reviewers, will appraise proposals for scientific quality and novelty. The Scientific Advisor will then make a recommendation to the Board, underpinned by

these reviews, which will be one of: accept proposal as is, accept proposal subject to minor changes, reconsideration following major changes, decline to fund. Comments made during the review process will be made available to the applicants to support further development of the proposal if required. The Board will make its decision and via Fordingbridge Office will communicate this to the applicant.

Following a decision not to make an award after the initial appraisal, the applicant will have a single opportunity to appeal this decision within one month. The applicant should submit a proposal revised according to the reviewers' and Research Committee's comments along with a letter within which they describe how the comments have been addressed and/or justification for why they believe any comments to be incorrect, and stating their case for why the application should be supported.

For applications that require re-submission the applicant will be allowed one month to refine their proposal according to comments received before re-submitting along with a letter addressed to the Board describing how the comments have been addressed.

Revised proposals and letters will be sent to the Research Committee so that they can provide a final appraisal or choose to send the proposal out for a second round of peer review before submitting their final recommendation to the Board. Following this process, any decision taken by the Board will be final, and no further opportunity of appeal will be offered to the applicant in the event of a decision not to make an award.

**Award of contract and payment** - Following a decision by the Board to make an award, the Society will send a letter of award to the successful applicant, with a statement of the terms and conditions, and a description of the award value and the schedule of payment. This and the accepted proposal will form the contract for commissioned research and grants, and hence must be signed by the Society and the applicant.

The applicant should invoice the Society for the agreed amount at least 31 days before the payment date stated in the payment schedule. Payment will normally be made once per year unless agreed otherwise in writing.

**Monitoring progress** – Award of funding requires monitoring of progress primarily so that any issues or changes in conditions can be communicated, and remedies negotiated if necessary. Grant awardees are required to submit a written interim report to Fordingbridge Office for dissemination to the Research Committee and for publication in the BDS Annual Review half-way through the research for *small grants*, and at 12-month intervals for *support grants* and *student support grants*. Progress will be assessed by the Research Committee against the aims, objectives and milestones stated in the research proposal. Reports will be sent to the Board accompanied by a brief statement from the Research Committee communicating their opinion on whether the report demonstrates satisfactory progress or not. Where progress is judged unsatisfactory, the grantee will be required to explain their reasons and to propose a way forward. Negotiation will be between the grantee and the Research Committee in the first instance, with a final decision made by the

Society's Chairman. Where agreement between the grantee and the Society cannot be reached, funding will cease immediately, and un-spent funds must be returned to the Society.

**Outputs and conditions of awards** – Since the main objective of the research strategy is to focus the Society's support on scientifically-robust research, the primary vehicles for dissemination of results are publication of results in peer-reviewed, scientific journals, and presentation at reputable conferences. The Society requests sight of papers in advance of submission to a journal, so that the Board can appraise potential consequences of publication in advance, and seek resolution with the author if necessary, but does not seek to veto them without extremely good reason. Applicants are required to submit a summary of their results, written in layman's terms for publication in the Society's journal DEER, within one month of publication online by the scientific journal. It will be the author's responsibility to ensure copyright is not infringed. If submission for publication in a scientific journal is not anticipated, the applicant must state their reasons to the Research Committee, to their satisfaction, and submit at least one summary article for publication in DEER within one year of the end of the research.

Presentation of results to the BDS and local BDS Branch is also encouraged.