

## **BDS Position on petition to eradicate deer from South Uist.**

The British Deer Society has been made aware of a petition from a member of Sealladh na Beinne Moire, to the Board of Sealladh na Beinne Moire, the owner of South Uist Estate, calling for the eradication of deer from the island.

We recognise that red deer have been present on South Uist since the last ice age until the late 1800s when they were eradicated. Roughly 100 years later, deer were reintroduced to the island. It should be noted that South Uist is part of the red deer refugia, established in 1999, which would now make it an offence to release any deer of the genus *Cervus* on the islands. This was done in the full knowledge that deer had already been reintroduced to South Uist.

James Scott, Scottish Policy Officer for the British Deer Society commented “The British Deer Society is fundamentally concerned by the “verminisation” of deer for any reason. We understand that there can be many conflicts between differing land uses and that deer can be part of that. We believe that deer should be valued and respected as part of our landscape and that the key to managing conflict is in striking the correct balance for the habitat and land use interests. Deer stalking and venison sales create revenue in many rural areas and although an eradication programme could increase the spending on deer management in the short term, we view such serious action as short sighted, especially given the legal difficulties associated with being able to undertake a future reintroduction of deer to the island.”

“The reasons for the petition, the alternative land use and revenue generation hinted at are not entirely clear. Much has been made of the threat of Lyme disease, but there are many other vectors of tick present on the island and to focus on a single species is not only unusual, but unlikely to be fruitful. Indeed, it is increasingly understood that deer produce antibodies which counter infection while also cleansing infected ticks of Lyme and prevent them from infecting anything else.”

“Sealladh na Beinne Moire as landowners have been taking the correct actions in our view. They have attempted to deal with marauding stags on croft land. They have been basing their decisions on the best information available, including commissioning a helicopter deer count and significantly increasing their cull to reduce the deer population.”

It is the hope of the British Deer Society that the members of Sealladh na Beinne Moire reject the petition for the eradication of deer at their meeting on the 20<sup>th</sup> of March and that deer continue to be a valued part of the South Uist landscape, being managed in balance with their habitat and other land use interests for the long term good of the land, the community and the deer themselves.

## Notes to editors.

1. The British Deer Society is a UK wide charity which speaks up for deer and sustainable deer management. Our goal is to ensure deer are valued and respected while being kept healthy and at sustainable numbers, so they can benefit biodiversity and the wider environment.
2. The British Deer Society was formed in 1963 and is celebrating its 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary this year.
3. Sealladh na Beinne Moire is the parent company of South Uist Estates, which has been community owned since 2006.
4. The recent deer count referred took place in 2022. It showed deer numbers were significantly higher than predicted based on a similar count in 2018. The deer cull was immediately increased, with the cull of stags nearly doubling and the cull of hinds increasing to nearly four times that of the year before.
5. The British Deer Society supports evidence-based deer management which seeks to reach compromise between differing land uses.
6. Contact: James Scott, Policy & External Affairs, Scotland, British Deer Society. 07977 558689 or [james.scott@bds.org.uk](mailto:james.scott@bds.org.uk)
7. The Extraordinary General Meeting to discuss this petition will be held on 20<sup>th</sup> March at 7.30 PM in the Southend Community Hall, Daliburgh, South Uist.