

BRITISH DEER SOCIETY POSITION STATEMENT

Hunting deer with hounds

Introduction

The UK has six species of deer: native red and roe deer; fallow deer and invasive, non-native sika, muntjac and water deer. Deer are an important part of the UK's countryside ecology and have a vital role to play in creating a balanced ecosystems. However, deer numbers are thought to be higher than at any time in the last 1,000 years, and in some areas of the UK they have reached levels where they may have a detrimental effect on habitats that they and other species depend on.

About Us

The British Deer Society [BDS] is a charity that operates throughout the UK dedicated to educating and inspiring everyone about deer, while focusing on deer welfare as a priority. Through our education and research, we raise awareness about wild deer and the issues surrounding them. We provide training to actively ensure deer can be managed humanely and safely to the very highest of standards.

We want to ensure wild deer in the UK are respected and valued while being kept healthy and at sustainable numbers, so they can benefit biodiversity and the wider environment. We accept that there is a requirement for the careful management of deer and to do this correctly we believe in systematic monitoring of deer impacts, and the development and implementation of deer management strategies. We currently have concerns about stag hunting healthy animals and have set out in this our position on best and acceptable practice.

Background.

- Deer management across the UK is more usually conducted using appropriate firearms under the terms of the Deer Act 1991 and other relevant legislation.
- Although the Hunting Act 2004 prohibits the hunting of certain species of wild mammals (more specifically fox, mink, hare, and deer) with dogs, sadly instances of deer being deliberately hunted with hounds continue to be reported. Under the Act the use of dogs in the killing of deer is permitted only under strictly laid down conditions. Relevant exemptions include:
 - Stalking and flushing out a wild mammal with a view to it being shot forthwith, and not using more than two dogs.
 - Recapture of an accidentally escaped wild mammal.
 - Rescue of a wild mammal believed injured, using not more than two dogs and no dog below ground (this exemption permits the use of dogs for the follow-up and despatch of wounded deer)

- Observation and study of a wild mammal, using not more than two dogs and no dog below ground.
- Traditional hunting practice is for a selected stag to be brought out of cover by hounds in pairs (the 'tufters'). Once up and running, the full pack is put on the scent until the stag 'brought to bay' by exhaustion whereupon it is shot at close range by a huntsman. Since the 2004 Hunting Act, the staghound packs have circumvented the legislation by employing only pairs of hounds and relying upon the 'observation and study exemption'. The pairs of hounds ('couples') may be replaced by fresh dogs during the chase.
- Some staghound pack supporters are currently claiming that hounds are able to detect diseased deer that appear healthy to human observers.
- Though noting that "there was not sufficient verifiable evidence or data safely to reach views about cruelty", the Burns Inquiry set up by the Government to examine the facts relating to hunting with dogs concluded in 2008 that it "seriously compromises" the welfare of the quarry species.
- In a report commissioned by the National Trust in 1997, Professor Bateson concluded that hunted deer experience high levels of stress and exhibit significant physiological effects. He stated that (red) deer are ill suited to lengthy chases as they do not naturally range over large areas, they cannot sweat, and their muscles are dominated by a type of fibre called type IIB which is specialised for bursts of activity rather than endurance.
- Professor Bateson also compared data concerning non-hunted deer, writing "These data on hunted deer contrast strongly with data on farmed deer and on clean-shot deer from Exmoor and Scotland. The non-hunted deer did not differ from each other. They had low levels of stress hormones, low levels of lactate and low levels of haemoglobin."
- The findings of the Bateson Report were challenged by some scientists on the basis that the physiology of deer could not be compared with that of other ungulates such as horses, but this objection was not widely supported, and the National Trust prohibited the hunting of deer with dogs on its estate in 1997.

1. Issue.

The British Deer Society (BDS) requires a public position on stag hunting in line with its animal welfare remit.

2. Concerns.

- The (often prolonged) pursuit of a hunted animal before its eventual despatch is not comparable with the selective and efficient use of an appropriate firearm for deer control.
- Public opinion increasingly questions the relevance of stag hunting and views it as an unacceptable recreational activity.
- Use of the 'observation and study' defence is widely seen as the cynical use of a legal loophole.
- Ongoing campaigns, which can involve disruptive tactics and legal challenges, are conducted by anti-hunting activists.

3. BDS Position.

- The BDS is unable to justify the deliberate pursuit of healthy deer with hounds as an acceptable method of control.



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- The BDS believes that if a deer can be located or even selected for hunting with hounds at the beginning of the day, it is far more humane to stalk it quietly and cull it humanely with a rifle rather than to chase it with hounds and then shoot it when it is exhausted.
- The BDS has seen no evidence that hounds are able to detect or select diseased deer that appear healthy to experienced humans. No peer-reviewed scientific work has given any weight to this theory.
- While the BDS accepts that there will be occasions where the control of deer numbers is necessary, we expect it to be conducted humanely and in full accordance with the law.
- The BDS fully supports the use of trained tracking dogs for the follow-up of injured deer.
- The BDS would anticipate the police taking appropriate action if national legislation is breached in any way and is prepared to supply appropriate advice on request.
- The BDS does not support, condone, or promote the use of disruptive behaviour or violence under any circumstances.

Further information can be found at:

[Why manage Deer? - The British Deer Society \(bds.org.uk\)](http://bds.org.uk)

Bateson, P. (1997)_*The behavioural and physiological effects of culling red deer*, report to the Council of the National Trust

Lord Burns *et al* (9 June 2000), *The Final Report of the Committee of Inquiry into Hunting with Dogs in England and Wales*, Her Majesty's Stationery Office.



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