



BirdWatchIreland
protecting birds and biodiversity

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BirdWatch Ireland comments on Draft Deer Management Policy Vision by the Inter-agency Deer Policy Group (2011)

To the Inter-agency Deer Policy Group:

BirdWatch Ireland welcomes the initiative to develop a deer management strategy for Ireland and support the overall approach outlined in the consultation document. As there are many ways in which bird and biodiversity interests are impacted by deer and by deer management, BirdWatch Ireland is keen to become involved in the further development of the strategy and to explore ways in which we can contribute to the implementation of the strategy at a later stage.

We note that there is only one native species in Ireland, the Red Deer, which is also farmed and kept in 'collections'. The other three, Fallow, Sika and Muntjac, have been introduced – the latter only very recently - and could be considered as an invasive species. The phenomenon of hybridisation between Red and Sika is well known but poorly understood.

The range and distribution of the four species plus hybrids is well summarised in a recent (2011) paper in Mammal Review and the recently initiated Irish Mammal Atlas should improve our knowledge on these topics but as the 'Vision' states, this will not improve our understanding of the numbers involved.

There are virtually no wild predators that can potentially control deer numbers though re-introduced White-tailed and Golden Eagles may take recently born kids/fawns. Deer carrion is undoubtedly important for many larger birds of prey and Ravens. Grazing by deer is an important part of woodland ecology though in the absence of natural predators, management to maintain deer populations at sustainable levels is often necessary to improve the quality of many woodland habitats.

In general terms BirdWatch Ireland is supportive of an approach that tackles long term deer control via targeted culling as a landscape scale control measure. Such an approach assists ground layer habitat quality improvements in woodlands where there is no deer fencing and is beneficial to natural regeneration within semi-natural woodland habitats. It will also assist in longer term objectives to improve the connectivity of woodland habitats through creation and management of 'stepping stones' and 'corridors' for the movement and dispersal of species though the wider countryside as called for in Article 10 of the Habitats Directive; Article 4 of the Birds Directive requires member states to avoid the deterioration of habitats outside of protected areas.



Directors: J Cromie Chairman, K Grace, AP Kelly, K O'Byrne, J O'Halloran, JB Peart, SP Roche

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One species that is particularly affected by the ground layer habitat quality is Woodcock. Irish Breeding Woodcock is amber listed on the Birds of Conservation Concern in Ireland (BOCCI) in, meaning that 20-50% decline in its range or numbers has occurred over a 25 year period. More recent Bird Atlas data, just in, suggests these declines are continuing. The precise requirements of the birds would need to be further investigated in relation to ground nesting conditions and deer grazing, although this will need to be considered as part of the development of the strategy.

Sustainable management of Ireland's wild deer population will require good baseline data on deer populations. Ongoing monitoring of populations is also necessary for sustainable management.

Another issue to consider is lead poisoning which can result from ingestion of fragmented rifle bullets eaten by scavengers as well as shotgun pellets. Recent research in the UK has shown this problem to be greater issue than previously realised.¹ Lead fragments in shot deer were found to be sufficiently small as to be ingested by scavenging birds, such as buzzards and eagles, which feed on them. This can cause lead poisoning in these birds.

BirdWatch Ireland Action Plans

BirdWatch Ireland has just published a suite of group action plans to provide a framework for the protection of priority, migratory and dispersed birds in the wider countryside. Deer Management comes up in several of these plans. In order to reflect environmental objectives, as stated in the vision of deer management policy vision, the development of the Deer Management Strategy should consider the implementation of these actions and consider bird interests in upland habitats as well as wooded habitats.

BirdWatch Ireland Action Plan for Upland Birds (2011-2020)

Theme 3, Target 11: By 2020 upland birds outside of designated sites benefit from targeted & sensitive management. Action 11.4: Devise and implement grazing management controls for livestock, wild and feral grazers in upland areas where over-grazing, or under-grazing, is damaging upland habitats – by 2020

BirdWatch Ireland Action Plan for Woodland and Scrub Birds (2011-2020)

Theme 1, Action 2.5: *Determine the role of grazing on woodland biodiversity and develop a strategy to encourage sustainable grazing levels where grazing is identified as a problem – by 2013 [Key stakeholders – Coillte, DAFM, Forest Service, Woodlands of Ireland]*

Theme 3, Target 9: Woodland and scrub birds outside of designated sites benefit from appropriate protection. Action 9.4: *Where appropriate include woodland and scrub bird interests in national*

¹ Implications for wildlife and humans of dietary exposure to lead from fragments of lead rifle bullets in deer shot in the UK. Knott, J et al, Science of the Total Environment 409 (2010) 95–99.



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strategies or plans to address alien invasive species , pest species or predator issues – by 2017 [Key stakeholders – BWI, Coillte, Forest Service, Invasive Species Ireland, NARGC, NPWS]

Action 9.5: Following research, carry out measures to control grazing in woodlands where it is deemed necessary for the conservation of woodland and scrub birds, biodiversity & habitats– by 2017 [Key stakeholders – BWI, Coillte, Forest Service, IFA, NARGC, NPWS]

Also relevant is the target 11: By 2020 all designated sites for woodland & scrub birds are managed appropriately with dedicated management plans [Key stakeholders–NPWS]

The latter target is relevant as management plans would likely need to include measures for controlling over- grazing in woodland habitats where there are significant impacts on habitat quality, similarly for conservation management planning in upland habitats.

Red Deer on Inishvickallane, Blasket Islands

Inishvickillane is an important part of the Blasket Islands IBA/SPA for species such as Manx Shearwater and Atlantic Puffins. Relative to the size of the island there is a large sub-population of Red Deer which were introduced to the island from Killarney National Park as a genetic safeguard. These deer could have an impact, though this has not been determined, on priority burrow-nesting seabirds via trampling/collapsing burrows and maybe disturbance of gull colonies. On the Scottish Hebridean Island of Rum, Red Deer have been recorded eating Manx Shearwater fledglings (when they emerge from their burrows) as a source of calcium. We would be interested to establish if this also takes place in the Blaskets.

We look forward to liaising further with the inter-agency deer policy group and participating in further actions to develop a deer management policy for Ireland.

With Kind Regards

Anja Murray,

Policy Officer –Land Use and Habitats

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