



Cois Abhann  
Ballymacmague  
Dungarvan  
Co. Waterford

Friday, 04 November 2011

Dear Sir/madam,

I have been involved in the management of deer in West Waterford for 25 years . I have set up an ad hoc group in the area , the West Waterford Deer Management Group, and we are represented on the Coillte Social Environmental Panel for Waterford and South Tipperary.

We would concur with general assumption that deer numbers have increased steadily over the last 15 years in particular.

However as there is no base line on which to anchor this assumption; it is very much an anecdotal observation and may be wildly inaccurate .

i.e. The fallow deer population in Colligan Wood, Dungarvan, Co. Waterford 25 years ago was observed to be circa 30 deer in four small groups. At that time the wood had been subjected to excessive hunting which had almost eliminated the original population which numbered in the hundreds.

Coillte found it difficult to find anyone prepared to lease the wood which had not only been overhunted by the previous lessee but was subject to uncontrolled poaching using every conceivable method from snaring to shooting with solid slugs from shotguns.

The population was allowed to recover by conservation of the doe population and a balance was achieved after 10 years between those involved in the Coillte lease of the wood and legitimate stalkers with stalking outside the wood. Poaching was substantially reduced.

In regard to the Coillte Lease the operational cull of deer was controlled by the cull number . This was artificially low due to the destruction of the herd as mentioned. When fallow deer numbers recovered the cull was not increased and in any event the Coillte procedure of expecting lease bids to be based on a price per deer in the cull did not encourage potential stalkers to look for an increase in cull figures.

Numbers appeared to climb throughout the West Waterford East Cork area until 2009 when a sudden decline in numbers began to be observed .The current population of deer in the Black Hill section of Colligan Wood is observed to be one third of the population observed in 2008 .

Deer are being hunted inexorable through the closed and open season by poachers for financial gain and by owners of packs of dogs . Section 42 exemptions to hunt deer in the closed season have been issued without any controls or active supervision. Groups of fawns were observed in the month of September in the Knockadav area , Ballysaggart, Lismore, Co.Waterford and this is as a result of does being shot mainly using lamps under the protection of sect 42 exemptions .

The net result of this activity is to actually scatter deer into new areas and during fox hunting I have noted groups of deer being flushed from very small woods and copses . This is a very new phenomena in this area.

Coillte who control a substantial section of lease for deer shooting have operated a policy which despite the points system has been skewed in favour of the highest bidder. The highest bidder has either been a commercial shoot which can only sell stag (trophy shooting) or the wealthy dilettante who cannot afford the time or energy to manage a wood properly. Anyone who is familiar with deer stalking a broad would know that the cost of client stalking in Ireland is ridiculously high in comparison with our nearest neighbours e.g. the cost to shoot one Sika stag in Wicklow is more expensive than a week's doe culling in Scotland including transport and lodgings. A Coillte wood with a cull of four deer in Waterford is €2000+ Vat . A wood with a cull of three hundred deer in Port Talbot , Wales is €3400.

The problem then is to a) count the deer and then b) to manage them responsible in the long term and c) police the business effectively.

Deer cannot be managed if you cannot find them and you cannot find them if they are being hunted inexorable day and night by all and sundry.

If Coillte and other forestry owners are to manage deer through stalking, cull figures need to be abandoned and replaced with management targets.

Stalkers should be encouraged to adopt for the long-term the management of woods and not for five year lease that can be lost, no matter how much effort is put into the management of the deer, because someone who is completely ignorant of management can pay more.

Conversely if a wood is not being managed effectively the lease should be withdrawn and offered to more responsible stalkers.

Yours Sincerely

  
Capt. Neil Forde