

ENGLAND &
WALES **BEST
PRACTICE
GUIDES**

Deer Management Group.

Deer Management





Introduction

The aim of this guide is to describe how a voluntary Deer Management Group (DMG) can be of benefit and the principles of how such a group should work.

This guide links to the Cross Boundary Liaison guide.



Why have a DMG?

Deer are often managed on the basis of individual property boundaries and contact between those responsible for land holdings and the management of deer can sometimes be minimal.

Belonging to a wider DMG has a number of potential benefits.

At it's simplest a DMG can:

- Act as a forum, both for sharing experience, skills, best practice and training.
- Inform on, and address, local and national deer issues such as changes to legislation or rural crime issues.

In most cases the deer range extends across multiple land ownerships.

Where there is a consensus to manage deer with some degree of collaboration a DMG can also:

- Support the achievement of common management objectives.
- Promote compromise in the management of a shared resource.
- Enable the cooperative use of common or shared facilities or marketing strategies.

Forming a DMG

DMGs tend to form out of a common interest between neighbouring properties, then often grow to include much of the local deer range.

Occasionally a group is formed to address a specific issue, such as deer impact to a protected site e.g. SSSI.

Whilst there is no harm in forming a group that simply acts as a forum for likeminded individuals, the members of a truly active DMG will make decisions and take actions affecting deer in the group area.

There is no standard DMG model that applies universally but the following are some of the main elements:

Communication

This is the key to group cohesion.

To keep momentum in the group an active coordinator is essential.

Groups thrive on interested, well informed members.

Meetings are ideally social as well as business events and can be made more interesting by varying venues, inviting speakers and holding practical demonstrations or visits.

Much of the communication can be carried out by email or messaging app.

If meetings are infrequent a regular newsletter is a good way to keep members informed.

Membership

Should be as inclusive as possible and include some or all of the following:

- Landowners
- Land managers/agents
- Tenants
- Stalkers who are active within the group area
- Members of relevant organisations and agencies
- Police Wildlife Crime Officer or equivalent
- Other relevant individuals



The majority of members should be those that are able to make and action decisions regarding deer in the group area, these are usually the landowners (or their representatives) and holders of stalking rights.

Constitution

A DMG usually has a simple constitution which declares its aims and objectives, operating methods, composition, and finance (if appropriate).

It is advisable to consider if any legal issues are relevant.

As a starting point all participants should be able to agree to the principle of maintaining deer numbers at levels where the welfare and utilisation of the deer, the condition of their environment and other potential deer impacts can be reconciled.

The degree of formality varies but many DMGs have a small committee with a Chair and Secretary. Usually there are no finances involved but when there is, there should be a treasurer.

Meetings

The group should meet at least once a year.

Usually there is a convenient date which suits most and fits in with the deer management year, a few weeks after or just before the female open season, April/ May or Sept/ October are often chosen.

All members should make every effort to attend.

It is important that notes of meetings are kept and circulated to all members.

Group business

The business of the group should include the following:

- Creation and maintenance of members details. In the early stages and for new members a member's questionnaire is useful, detailing contacts, location, land area responsible for and other details of interest to the group. A simple welcome document will help to explain what the group is about to prospective members.
- Creation and update of maps. These should show at least the intended group boundary and the known deer range by species. Other maps may show (by agreement); boundaries of areas actively managed by individual members, and thus those areas either managed by non-members, not managed or for which there is no information; census or cull details. Maps are often the basis of discussions at meetings, for instance, for indicating deer population movements across the DMG area or plotting poaching incidents.
- Organise and record a regular census. The methodology chosen is not important as long as it is used consistently over the years. A census is not essential and there is no expectation of the results accurately reflecting the actual total of deer, however a collective census, preferably carried out across all properties at the same time is a useful group exercise and can indicate trends over time (see the Census guide).
- Collation of cull data. Cull records are an important way of measuring action on the ground. Such records should at least detail culls by species and sex. Other data such as likely recruitment rates and body condition are also useful, see the Cull Records guide.
- Deer Management Plans (DMPs). Individuals within the group will usually have their own DMP and should be encouraged to share it's objectives with the group. Where a population of deer crosses several or most of the holdings within the group area it may be appropriate to form a group DMP which outlines group objectives and sets some reasonable targets using such measures as census, habitat impacts, herd condition and so on (see the Management Plans guide)
- Liaison. Between the group and other organisations (such as the police) or individuals. The group may also act as a stimulus for cooperation between individual holdings within the group area. This could include both members and non-members. See the Cross Boundary Liaison guide.

- Encouraging members to support and operate according to Best Practice. The Deer Initiative Best Practice guides are the result of extensive industry consultation and provide guidance on many practical aspects of wild deer management. Groups can arrange for skills or knowledge updating using facilities and expertise either from within or outside the group.

Confidentiality

The custody and distribution pattern of all member and group information should be agreed in the constitution and be handled in line with data protection regulations.

Especially in a newly formed group, members might consider some information sensitive, requiring a degree of confidentiality.

Typically, data such as property boundaries and individual census or cull records may come into this category.

One way to overcome reticence is to ask members to submit, for instance, cull or census data, to the secretary or an independent third party who will then pool the data and then report it anonymously for the whole group area.

If it has been agreed that data from individual members are not shared, or must at least be kept within the group, this must be strictly observed.

As confidence in the group grows a more open submission and reporting style often develops.