

An Committee(s):	Date(s):
Epping Forest and Commons	08 July 2013
Subject: Epping Forest: Deer management on the Buffer Lands and Epping Forest.	Public
Report of: The Superintendent of Epping Forest SEF 23/13	For Decision
Summary	
<p>This report is to seek your Committees approval for the annual cull of deer, on the Buffer Lands and Epping Forest, in line with the Deer Management Plan (DMP) adopted by your Committee on 10 September 2012. The 2013 day time deer count recorded 299 Fallow and 43 Reeves Muntjac. The 2012/13 deer cull amounted to 94 Fallow and 16 Reeves Muntjac.</p> <p>The proposed cull figures for the 2013/14 season are 123 Fallow Deer and as many Reeves Muntjac Deer as possible. The cull figures have been set using data from the deer count and recommendations from the Deer Management Plan, presented as part of English Woodland Grant Scheme application presented to your Committee in September 2012. The agreed plan recommended a gradual population reduction over 5 years to 150 Fallow Deer.</p> <p>An alternative survey of deer was carried out by the University of East Anglia which recommends lowering deer numbers over a shorter time period would require additional resources and may be counter-productive.</p>	
Recommendation(s)	
Members are asked to	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approve the cull figure of up to 123 Fallow deer and an unlimited cull of reeves Muntjac, for the 2013/14 season in line with the Deer Management Plan. 	

Main Report

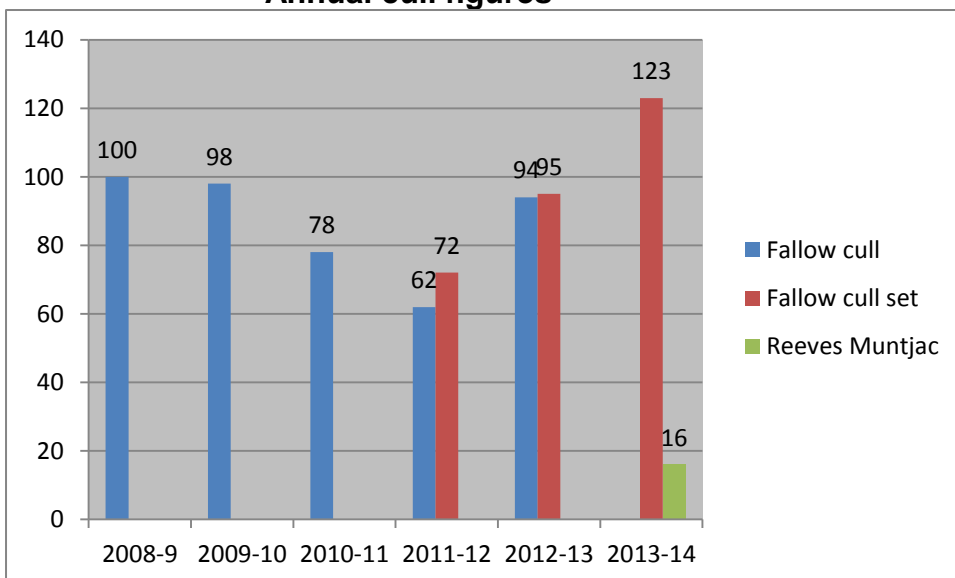
Background

1. This report is brought to you in response to your Committees request in 2012 to be given an annual update of the outcome of the spring deer count, the annual deer cull and the details of the cull figures set for the next season as a result of the data collected. In response to your request your Committee received the initial report at your meeting of 9 July 2012 entitled "Deer Management on the Buffer Lands" (SEF 21/12).

2. A second report was received at your meeting of 10 September 2012 entitled “English Woodland Grant Scheme application for the management of deer and woodlands in the Epping Forest Buffer Land Estate.” (SEF 30/12) which required a “Deer management Plan” (DMP) to be written which was approved by your Committee as “Appendix B” to the above mentioned report.
3. The DMP concluded that the level of damage by both Fallow and Reeves Muntjac deer, to Buffer Land woodlands, was much higher than expected and that the level of cull targets needed to be set at a higher level.
4. The recommendations of the DMP were taken into account when the annual Fallow deer cull figure was set by the Head Forest Keeper for the 2012/13 deer season. An increase of 30% on the previous year’s cull figure was set as part of the recommended 5 year plan to reduce spring herd numbers to 150. The resulting cull figure for 2012/13 was 95, while the actual cull achieved was 94. See Table 1 below.
5. The DMP also recommended that the culling Of Reeves Muntjac should be seen as a much higher priority in the future, therefore, the licenced stalkers were instructed to cull as many of the estimated population of 150 as possible in the forthcoming season.

Table 1

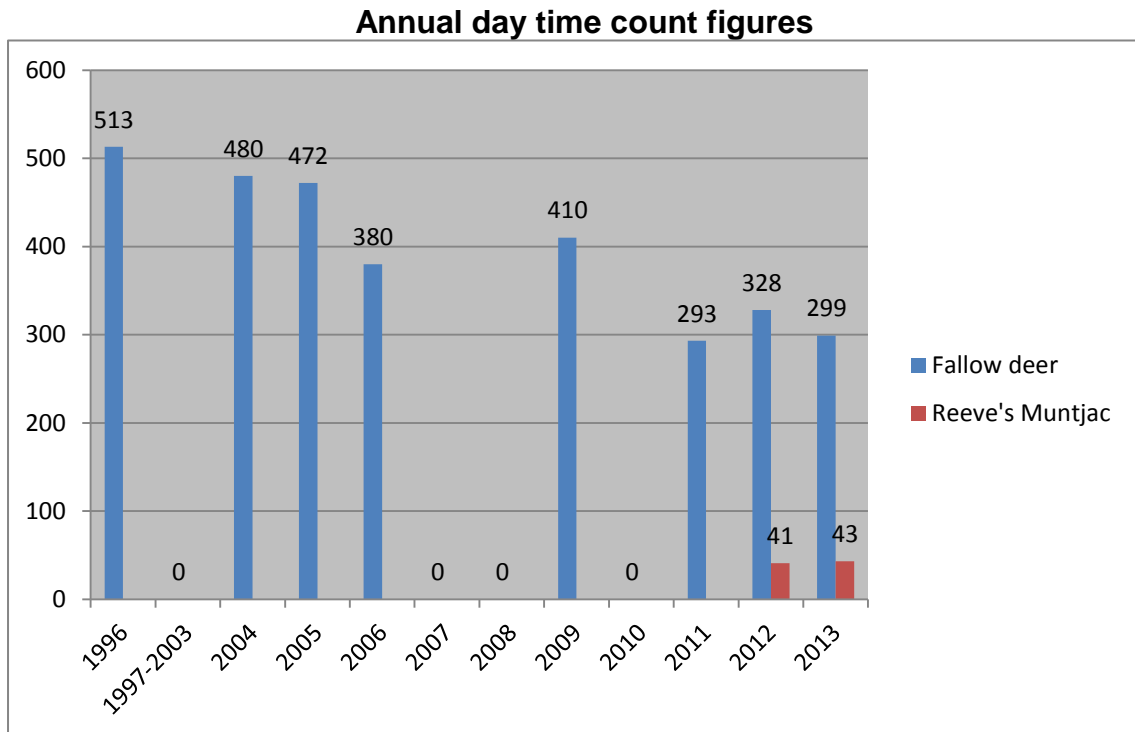
Annual cull figures



Current Position

6. The annual “day time deer count” took place on 28 February 2013 which resulted in a count of 299 Fallow deer. This shows a 9.5% decrease on the previous year’s figure of 328. 43 Reeves Muntjac were also recorded as opposed to 41 in 2012. See Table 2 below

Table 2



7. In line with the recommendations of the DMP and using the data from the annual day time count, the annual cull figures for fallow deer will be set each year in order to maintain a reduction in the number of deer counted in the spring until the annual count is reduced to the recommended figure of 150 and the desired ratio of males/females, young/ mature is achieved. Using the data collected this year an increase of 30% will be put in place for next season. This will result in a proposed cull figure for 2013/14 of 123 Fallow deer. See Table 1 above.

8. The cull figure of 123 Fallow will be broken down as follows:

- Fallow Bucks over 2 years old will not be culled to try and increase the number and quality of mature Bucks.
- Prickets (1 to 2 years old male) 17
- Buck fawns (up to 1 year old male) 14
- Does (female) 69

- Doe fawns (up to 1 year old female) 23

9. The “Deer Management Plan” also recommends that the culling of Reeves Muntjac should now be a higher priority; therefore a high priority approach has been implemented. As this species has no close season the culling can take place at any time of year, giving a greater chance for the licenced stalkers to reduce the numbers to an acceptable level. The Muntjac cull so far this year stands at 16. See Table 1 above.
10. The University of East Anglia (UEA) recently carried out an in depth deer census in the Norfolk/Suffolk border area, the results of which were published in the “Journal of Wildlife Management” 7 March 2013. The conclusions were similar to those in the DMP approved by your Committee that the annual cull of all species of deer must be dramatically increased in order to maintain National deer herds at acceptable levels. The main difference being that UEA recommended that the numbers should be reduced over a much shorter period, with annual cull targets of 60% plus. In order to use this option a greater number of stalkers would need to be both licenced and managed by Epping Forest staff. This would need a considerable amount of time and resources that may not even result in achieving the increased annual cull. The area of land under the management of the Conservators is small in the context of the overall area a herd may travel over, an increased level and frequency of culling by a greater number of stalkers would result in the deer being temporarily scared away and no culling being able to take place until a period of tranquility allowed the deer to return.
11. The numbers of “Deer Vehicle Collisions” (DVCs) in the Epping Forest area have not mirrored the changes in the annual day time count figures. The year, 1 March 2012 to 28 February 2013 the figure was 86 DVCs as opposed to the previous five year average of 64 DVCs, an increase of 34%, with the 2013 annual day time count showing a 9.5% decrease in numbers. DVCs are not a simple response to overall deer populations, and are the result of a range of factors including increased reporting; traffic volumes and the level of disturbance from estate operations and visitors.

Options

12. There are two options available to your Committee:-
 - Option one is to follow the recommendations of the DMP adopted by your Committee in September 2012, to reduce the deer population over a five year period.
 - Option two is to follow the UEA proposal to reduce deer populations over a shorter period, as described in paragraph 10. above.

Proposals

13. It is proposed that Option one is approved, to follow the five year plan recommended in the “Deer Management Plan” presented to your Committee as Appendix B of the report “English Woodland Grant Scheme application for the management of deer and woodlands in the Epping Forest Buffer Land Estate.” (SEF 30/12) 10 September 2012. This option is more realistic using current resources to meet the annual cull.

Corporate & Strategic Implications

14. The effective management of deer populations on the Buffer Land estate supports ‘The City Together Strategy: The Heart of a World Class City’ 2008-14 under the following theme:
 - protects, promotes and enhances our environment.
15. The report also supports the Open Spaces Business Plan 2013-16 aims of protecting, promoting and enhancing our environment by delivering sustainable working practises to promote the variety of life and protecting open spaces for the enjoyment of future generations.

Implications

16. **Financial-** The culling of deer on the Buffer Lands is currently carried out at no cost to the Conservators. Four Licensed stalkers carry out the cull and in return the carcasses of any deer culled become the property of the stalker.
17. **Risk Implications-** All of the licensed stalkers are fully qualified and hold all necessary firearms and food hygiene certificates to legally carry out the cull. They all have £10 million insurance cover to indemnify the City of London and produce annual risk assessments covering all tasks involved with culling the deer.
18. The stalkers provide all their own equipment and are obliged to follow policies laid down by the Head Forest Keeper in respect of numbers of deer culled, times/days when stalking is permitted, areas allocated to each stalker and records to be kept.
19. **Legal Implication -** Under section 4 of the Epping Forest Act 1878, Deer on Forest Land are considered to be the property of the Conservators ‘to be preserved as objects of ornament in the Forest’. Outside the Forest, Deer are wild animals, or *ferae naturae* under common law, and are not owned by anyone. In England and Wales, the landowner has the right to kill or take game on his or her land. The landowner may also extend authority, known as ‘permission’, to other people without restriction provided they observe “The Deer act 1991” which lays out all the relative law in terms of close seasons and legal methods of culling.

Conclusion

20. In the absence of natural predators, the culling of deer on the Buffer Lands is a necessity that benefits the overall health of deer populations, together with the economic viability of agricultural crops and grasslands. Critically for Forest Land and the Buffer Land woodlands, deer populations need to be managed at levels which allow sufficient levels of woodland regeneration through the growth of sufficient numbers of young tree seedlings, understory plants and shrub species. Combining the future management of the woodlands with that of deer populations, particularly through the closer coordination and control of culling operations will be beneficial to all concerned and will help maintain this important area in the years ahead.
21. In order to achieve the target of a spring count of 150 Fallow deer within 5 years, as recommended in the "Deer Management Plan" an increase of 30% in cull figures is recommended for the coming 2013/14 shooting season.
 - Appendix 1 – Map of annual day time deer count area.

Background Papers:

"Deer Management on the Buffer Lands" (SEF 21/12)
9 July 2012

"English Woodland Grant Scheme application for the management of deer and woodlands in the Epping Forest Buffer Land Estate." (SEF 30/12)
10 September 2012

University of East Anglia deer survey, "Journal of Wildlife Management" 7 March 2013

K French
Head Forest Keeper
T: 02085325310
E: keith.french@cityoflondon.gov.uk