

<b>Committee(s):</b>	<b>Date(s):</b>
Epping Forest and Commons	6/7/2015
<b>Subject:</b> Epping Forest: Deer Management of the South West Essex Deer Herd on the Buffer Lands and Epping Forest.	<b>Public</b>
<b>Report of:</b> Superintendent of Epping Forest (SEF 30/15)	<b>For Decision</b>
<b>Summary</b>	
<p>The purpose of this report is to summarise the performance of the 2014/15 deer cull; to provide details of the 2015 deer count and propose 2015 deer cull targets for both Fallow and Reeves Muntjac Deer on the Buffer Lands and Epping Forest, reflecting the objectives set out in the Deer Management Plan (DMP) adopted by your Committee on 10<sup>th</sup> September 2012. The DMP recommended a 30% increase on the number of Fallow Deer culled, as part of a gradual population reduction over 5 years to 150 spring Fallow Deer, providing an average spring population density of 3 per 100 acres across the 5,146 acre count area.</p> <p>The 2015/15 deer cull target was for a minimum of 105 Fallow Deer and as many Reeves Muntjac Deer that could be shot across the count area. The actual City of London cull amounted to 112 Fallow and 10 Reeves Muntjac. The Fallow Deer cull was therefore met and exceeded.</p> <p>The 2015 day time deer count recorded 341 Fallow and 10 Reeves Muntjac. This shows a 37% decrease on the previous year's Fallow Deer figure of 505. 25 Reeves Muntjac were also recorded as opposed to 44 in 2014, a fall of 43%. The number of Deer Vehicle Collisions (DVCs) in the Forest locality, an area wider than the count area, also decreased from 123 to 82 DVCs, a decrease of 33%. Year on-year populations vary significantly due to variable factors such as weather; patterns of disturbance and the availability of winter food supplies. The more reliable five-year average for 2011-2015 is 353 Fallow Deer, up 24% on the previous five-year average for 2010-2014 (based on four counts). This equates to an average population density of 6.8 deer per 100 acres. The proposed cull figures for the 2015/16 season recommended to your Committee are 86 Fallow Deer and as many Reeves Muntjac Deer as possible.</p> <p>Further meetings between the major estate owners of land within the boundaries of the South West Essex Deer Herd were, as agreed by your Committee, arranged by the City of London licenced deer stalkers and mediated by the Deer Initiative, some cull figures were made available at the meetings.</p> <p>Collaborative culls, in conjunction with neighbouring landowners/stalkers, were carried out in the areas agreed by your Committee to be added to the land under active deer management by the City of London.</p>	

## **Recommendation(s)**

Members are asked to:

- Approve the cull figure of a minimum 86 Fallow deer and an unlimited cull of Reeves Muntjac, for the 2015/16 season in line with the Deer Management Plan.
- Approve further meetings between the major estate owners of land within the range of the South West Essex Deer Herd, mediated by the Deer Initiative to encourage increased co-operation on the overall management of the Deer Herd.
- Approve moving to a three year licencing system in 2016 to help improve the management of infrastructure needed to support the cull.

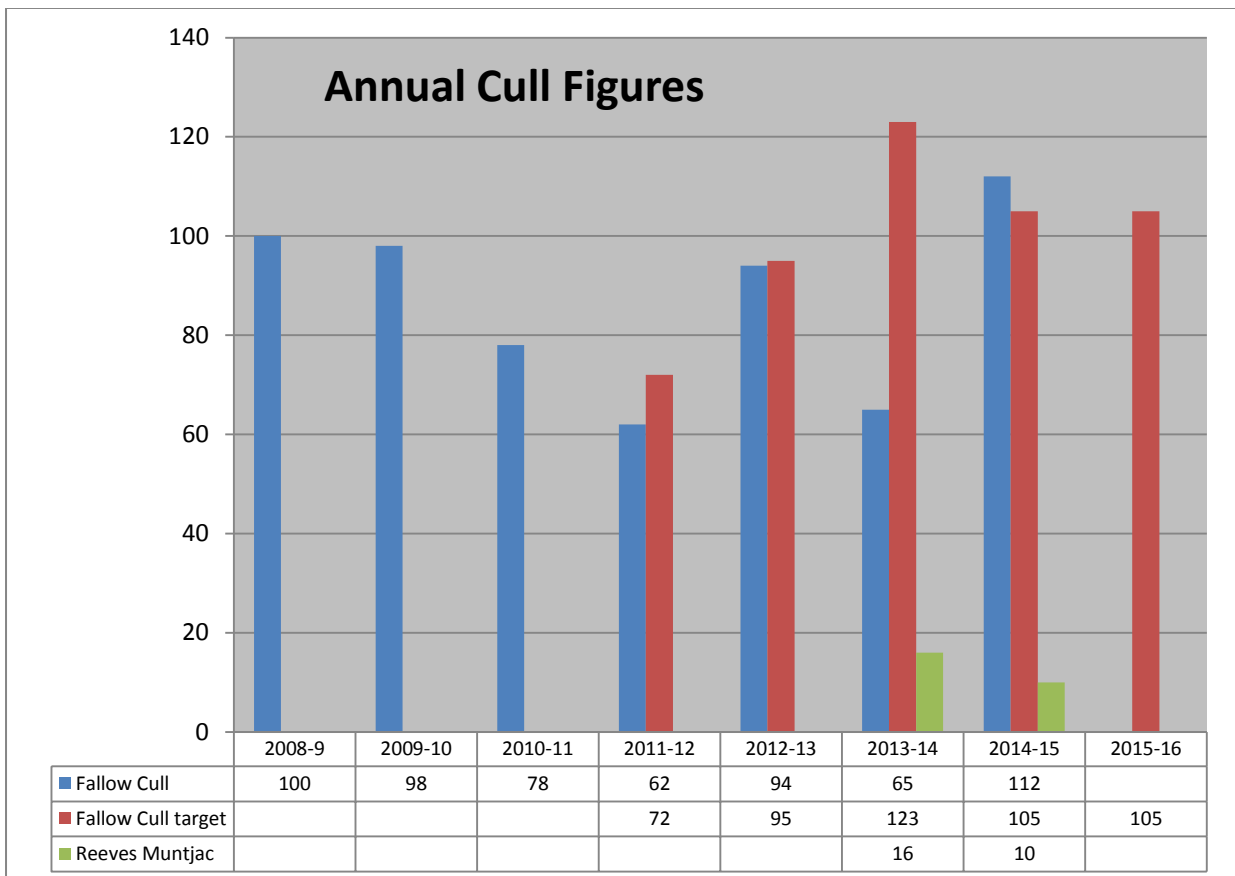
## **Main Report**

### **Background**

1. This annual report provides an update of the outcome of the spring deer count, the annual deer cull and proposes cull figures for the next season as a result of the data collected. It also proposes approving a 3 year agreement to a group of stalkers to allow them to invest in the infrastructure and carry out preparatory works necessary to complete future culls.
2. 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, the South West Essex deer population needs to be managed at levels which allow sufficient levels of woodland regeneration through the growth of sufficient numbers of young tree seedlings, understorey 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.
3. An annual report to your Committee on 9 July 2012, "Deer Management on the Buffer Lands" (SEF 21/12) 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. The DMP recommended a 30% increase on the number of Fallow Deer culled, as part of a gradual population reduction over 5 years to 150 spring Fallow Deer, providing an average spring population density of 3 per 100 acres across the 5,146 acre count area.

4. The Deer Act 1991 restricts the “window” for culling deer to between the 1 hour before sunrise and 1 hour after sunset. One of the concerns associated with any proposed larger scale cull was that the deer would change habits and become more nocturnal and increase their range due to the increased disturbance. This change in habit may restrict the amount of deer that could be effectively culled. The range of the herd is being monitored by ear tagging some fawns each year. This practise is now in it’s fourth year and is starting to give some results.
5. The DMP also recommended that the culling of Reeves Muntjac should be seen as a much higher priority. The licenced stalkers were therefore instructed to cull as many of the population, estimated at 150, as possible in the 2014/15 season.

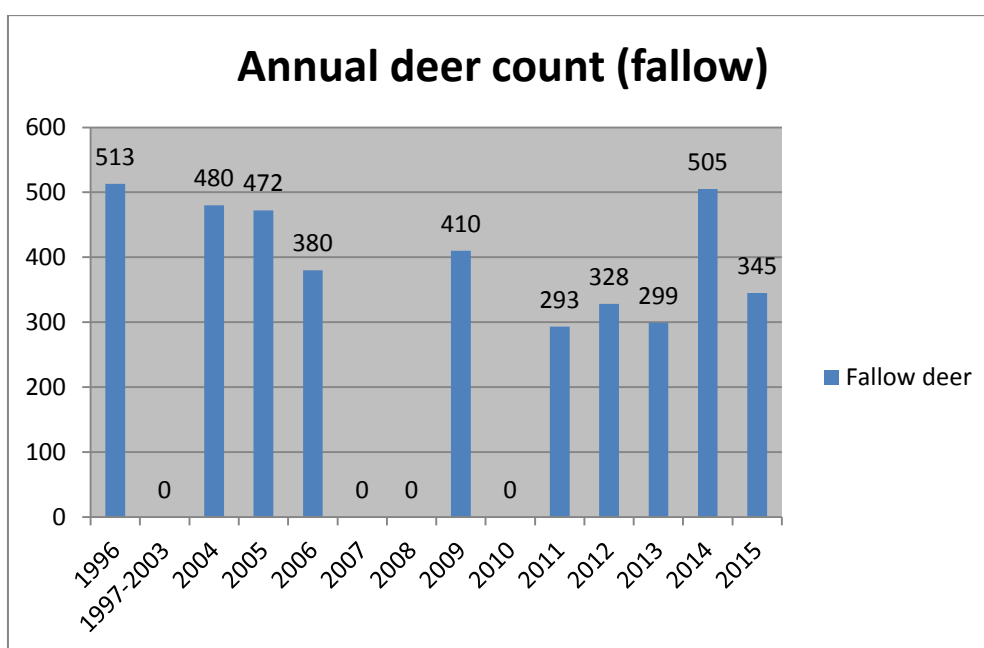
**Table 1**  
**Annual cull figures**



## Current Position

6. The annual “day time deer count” took place on 11th March 2015 which resulted in a count of 345 Fallow deer. This shows a 37% decrease on the previous year’s figure of 505. (See Table 2 below.) 25 Reeves Muntjac were also recorded as opposed to 44 in 2014, this shows a decrease of 43%. 98 Fallow Deer were counted in the 770 acres of Epping Forest Land, which represents 15% of the count area, just 3 less than the previous year.

**Table 2**  
**Annual day time count figures**



7. Year-on-year populations vary significantly due to variable factors such as weather; patterns of disturbance and the availability of winter food supplies. The more reliable five-year average for 2011-2015 is 353 Fallow Deer, up 24% on the previous five-year average for 2010-2014 (based on only four counts). This equates to an average population density of 6.8 deer per 100 acres, this is a more accurate figure as it is based on data collected every year during the last five years and is still more than double the DMP target of 3 deer per 100 acres.
8. 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 are 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.

9. There are several contributing factors to the change in deer distribution recorded on the daytime deer counts;
  - a. Milder winters can lead to improved deer fecundity
  - b. The 2013/14 winter was one of the wettest on record restricting deer mobility; this coincided with the doe season, 1st November to 31<sup>st</sup> March.
  - c. 2013 was a "Mast year" which meant there was a large amount of natural food, causing the deer to be more nomadic and spend more time in an area where they found the food, often on land where there was not any deer management taking place.
  - d. The cumulative increase in cull percentages over the past years has caused pressure on the Fallow herd encouraging deer to increase their range beyond the influence of the licenced stalkers.
  - e. The cull area managed by The City of London licensed stalkers is only 15% of the total area.
10. The Muntjac cull so far this year stands at 10. 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. See Table 1 above. The Reeves Muntjac population has remained fairly static, an increase of 1 animal,
11. In 2012, the tagging of Fallow fawns was piloted for the first time. The aim was to further evaluate the extent of the Fallow range. This has now entered into a 4th project year. Observations show that the South West Essex herd moves freely from East of Copped Hall to the edge of Harlow at Latton Priory/Hastingswood. It should be noted that there are current plans for development to take place over the Latton Priory area, which may place more pressure on the Fallow population and contribute to further displacement which will directly impact future numbers.
12. While the deer count area extends to 5,146 acres, the area of land under the direct management of the Conservators included in the cull is only 770 acres, or 15% of the land covered in the annual count. The remainder is owned by some 12 landowners, many of whom have differing views on and priorities for deer management. Some landowners apply significant pressure on the deer herd pushing them into quieter areas. A cooperative approach to Deer Management has been explored with these neighbours. Meetings have been arranged by the current City of London licenced stalkers, all local landowners were invited to attend along with their stalkers. The meetings were chaired by David Hooton, Senior Officer of the Deer Initiative, landowners remain very supportive in the annual count activity, and the liaison has resulted in some collaborative culls taking place which have been highly successful in extending the areas where deer can be managed. This level of co-ordination has not yet however extended to joint cull setting and the comprehensive sharing of cull data.
13. The remaining 12 neighbouring landowners, which cover the remaining 85% of the count area, employ stalkers to control the deer numbers, some cull figures from individuals were presented at the end of season meeting but

were not to a standard that could really help with planning future culls. The figures showed that more deer had been culled than had been counted. The next objective of any future meetings is to set a standard reporting system for all landowners and stalkers to enable accurate reporting and future cull setting to the same level as the City of London. The total number of stalkers on this land extends to some 12 individuals.

14. The numbers of “Deer Vehicle Collisions” (DVCs) in the Epping Forest area have almost mirrored the changes in the annual day time count figures. In the year, 1 March 2014 to 28 February 2015 the figure was 82 DVCs as opposed to the previous year’s figure of 123, a decrease of 33%, compared with the 37% decrease in numbers shown in the 2015 annual day time count. Though a matter of concern it should be noted that DVCs are measured across a much larger area than the count area. DVCs are also 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

15. There are a number of options available to your Committee:-
  - Option one is to increase the 2014/15 cull figure of 105 Fallow Deer by the 5 year average of 7% to 112 Fallow Deer. This is not recommended as it would risk increasing the disturbance “window” around sunset and sunrise and potentially further reduce the deer population available for culling at this time.
  - Option Two is to retain the cull figure at a minimum of 105 Fallow Deer within the existing cull area which now includes part of St Thomas” Quarters, Fern Hall Wood and City of London land North of Cobbins Brook.
  - Option Three is to reduce the cull figure by 37% to a minimum of 66 Fallow Deer, in line with the decrease in the day time count.
  - Option four is to take the middle ground and reduce the cull by 18% to a minimum of 86 Fallow deer.

## Proposals

16. It is proposed that Option four is approved. This option takes into account the increased liaison with surrounding land owners and stalkers and the level of culling they are reporting and also the possible over reporting of the overall cull carried out by the surrounding landowners and stalkers. There would need to be a mid season review of the figures depending on the numbers of deer encountered during the first part of the season.

17. In order to maximise the effective cull for 2013/14 a minimum cull figure for 2015/16 of 86 Fallow deer is proposed. See Table 1 above. The proposed cull figure of 86 Fallow is recommended to 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 in the herd.
  - Prickets (1 to 2 years old male) 14
  - Buck fawns (up to 1 year old male) 4
  - Does (female) 57
  - Doe fawns (up to 1 year old female) 11
18. The Superintendent has previously given undertakings to market test the stalking contract in line with City of London Procurement Service guidance and a wider review of estate contracts and licences. The current licence holders, the Cobbins Brook Deer Management Group, have indicated that a three year stalking agreement would be preferential in managing infrastructure needed to support a cull. It is further proposed to instigate a tender process for a 3 year stalking contract commencing 1<sup>st</sup> August 2016.

### **Corporate & Strategic Implications**

19. The proposal, if approved, meets ***The City Together Strategy: the Heart of a World Class City 2008-14*** vision of a *World Class City* and, specifically, theme 3 of its 5 themes „a world class city which protects, promotes and enhances our environment“.
20. The report also supports the Open Spaces Business Plan 2012-15 aims of protecting, promoting and enhancing our environment by delivering sustainable working practices to promote the variety of life.

### **Implications**

21. **Financial-** The culling of deer on the Buffer Lands is currently carried out at no cost to the Conservators. Four stalkers Licensed by The City of London carry out the cull and in return the carcasses of any deer culled become the property of the stalker.
22. **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. Stalkers 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.
23. **Licensed stalkers-** Who are all qualified deer managers, 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. There is a commitment for the stalkers to carry out at least 100 outings each year, this has been exceeded and adds up to over 400 man hours in the season.

Epping Forest conditions prevent the gralloching (disembowelling) of deer on public access land.

24. **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. A landowner has the right to kill or take game on his or her land or permit others to do so subject to statutory restrictions. The Deer Act 1991 restricts the killing of deer (other than Muntjac) during the close season and at night other than under licence.

### **Conclusion**

25. In the absence of natural predators, the culling of deer on the Buffer Lands is a necessity that benefits the future of the woodlands, the overall health of the deer populations, together with the economic viability of agricultural crops and grasslands.
26. Given the wide range of the Epping Fallow Deer herd, which has recently been confirmed by ear tag observations, it is important that the 12 significant landowners in the 5,146 acre count area improve the current level of co-operation around shared objectives, counting, cull targets and cull reporting if the ambition of a sustainable deer herd is to be achieved by 2017.

### **Appendices- None**

### **Background Papers:**

“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

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