

## **Meeting minutes**

### **The Gairloch Conservation Unit**

**9.00am 4<sup>th</sup> December 2024 by Zoom**

In attendance – Sam Gibson - Grudie/ Sir Nicholas Bacon (Diabaig) Tim Bowie – Eisean Dubh/Doug Bartholomew - NatureScot/Ian Sargent - NatureScot/ /Seamus MacNally/Linzi Seivwright/Ben McKeown - NatureScot/Paul Bolton – NTS Torridon/Judith Hogg (Gairloch)

1. Apologies:, Tom Chetwynd, Tom Turnbull, Joan Cumming – Project Manager Glen Torridon Partnership, Donnie Beaton
2. Minutes of last meeting & matters arising – no matters raised
3. LS gave an update on matters relating to the ADMG and in particular the current Environment Bill. The evening before our meeting LS had attended a meeting at the Scottish Parliament at which the Rural Affairs and Island Committee were present. The Bill might possibly come forward in February 2025. The ADMG have issued a response and details can be seen at the following link: <https://www.deer-management.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/ADMG-Consultation-Response-23-March-2024.pdf> LS encouraged GCU members to subscribe to Esclope the regular members email update. A NatureScot pilot scheme including incentives to cull more deer is running presently. The aim is to increase the annual cull target by 50,000. ADMG are disappointed that there is no link to the venison price. LS also gave an overview of The Common Ground Forum where experienced civic mediators got a broad cross section of those involved in deer management around the table to look at creating greater understanding and tolerance. It has run successfully now for two years. LS would encourage the GCU to sign the accord. The Scottish Venison Association has undergone a revamp and has a stronger board of management and the SQWV is being reinvigorated to assist the marketing of more venison. Following more challenges created by increased public access the ADMG and Mountaineering Scotland have produced a short educational film (<https://readymag.website/mountainmatters/Autumn2024/10/>) DMG will hold a remote meeting via Teams on 14.01.25 and the AGM will be at Kingsmills in Inverness on 19.03.25. LS advised that it is a busy period, and members are encouraged to keep themselves up to date.
4. Regrettably Joan Cumming was unable to attend due to ill health but IS gave an update. The Glen Torridon Partnership is made up by NatureScot, The NTS, Ben Damph, The Woodland Trust (Beinn Shildaig/Couldoran) and Coulin. Currently it has a grant of £40,000 from HLF to look at capacity building and to build a thermal drone team of four local people for deer counting. The drones are being purchased by The Woodland Trust

with the aim of supporting the creation of local businesses. It is unknown when the training will be completed but there needs to be additional training to assist interpreting the data gathered. There will be a feasibility study for local venison production with a larder and processing at Shieldaig. Rhododendron removal is on-going. HIA's are being undertaken by NatureScot at Bein Eighe and NTS with some cross boundary collaboration on deer management. Finally, a more strategic document is being drafted on high level thinking about woodland restoration (for ancient pines). NB asked to see a copy of the Terms of Reference and commented on the need for long term control of rhododendron to stop regeneration. A copy of The Memorandum of Understanding can be shared (will be circulated with the minutes).

5. LS explained that given the age of the current management plan and changes in objectives of members a new plan should be considered. TB & LS are to draft a timetable and proposal for key elements to present to the group. This updated plan will aim to take account of landscape scale objectives.
6. Completed cull figures for 2023/24 – TB asked members to ideally submit by email so he could collate the totals for the group and these as before will assist in preparing subscriptions.
7. Spring counts 2025: It was agreed that the Partnership could share resources and the group should communicate about future counting and cull plans. We need to discuss at what landscape scale we will need to deliver the collective plans. How will future counts be undertaken – by helicopter or drone. JH confirmed that Gairloch plan a helicopter count next Spring. BM suggested the group complete more Herbivore impact assessments and LS asked if he would share the methodology with the group. Gairloch to confirm when they are counting. It was noted that Trees for Life have good methodology for data gathering and they may outsource this. Bein Eighe have completed more HIA's over the summer using two different methods (including dung pellet counts) to understand how deer are using different areas.
8. Finance including subscriptions: TB reported that the current balance is £1500.73 and that once cull numbers are known subscriptions will be collected in the New Year.
9. Any other business: The Chair welcomed Judith to the group and asked if Gairloch might consider upscaling the processing of venison on behalf of other group members. Linzi asked that it be noted that the new owners of Inverasdale may join the GCU. DB may liaise with the SW Ross Deer Group on **HIA (and dung counts)** work as IS pointed out these can be more helpful than a deer count on a single day.
10. Date of next meeting: 9.30am 9<sup>th</sup> May 2025 at NatureScot offices Anancaun