

# OUR DEER

## COMMUNITY INTEGRATED DEER MANAGEMENT IN SCOTLAND



The British Association for Shooting & Conservation

# Partners



# Foreword



The management of wild deer is a necessity, with many of Scotland’s foremost environmental goals being underpinned by effective deer management. Although the need to manage deer is broadly accepted by a diversity of stakeholders, views on how deer should be managed – and by whom – vary considerably.

There is one exception to this. Almost all deer management stakeholders accept that there are considerable merits of integrating communities in the management of Scotland’s deer – particularly in the lowland context. By this we mean giving trained recreational deer stalkers more opportunities to manage deer in their local area, as well as widening community participation in deer stalking through the provision of training.

The benefits of community integration are numerous, and the foundations of this vision are highly sustainable. It will build resilience into the management framework; it will enable a sustainable food source to be harvested, processed and consumed locally; it will effectively and flexibly protect the environment; it will improve economic productivity; and it will enhance community knowledge of deer impacts and benefits.

Achieving greater community integration will require a concerted effort by a diversity of stakeholders – including local communities, landowners, shooting organisations, statutory agencies and environmental NGOs. Only through collaborative working will key barriers – such as land availability, training provision, lack of infrastructure and supply chains – be effectively overcome.

In this document we lay out our case for community integrated deer management in Scotland. We will illustrate the key drivers for community integration and expand on what needs to be done to take things forward.

The document includes a series of recommendations for the Scottish Government to consider. Community integrated deer management has enormous potential, and it is our belief that these recommendations – coupled with the efforts of a diversity of stakeholders – constitute a viable means for realising this.

**Dr Colin B Shedden**  
BASC Scotland Director | Lowland Deer Network Scotland Chairman



# The Drivers

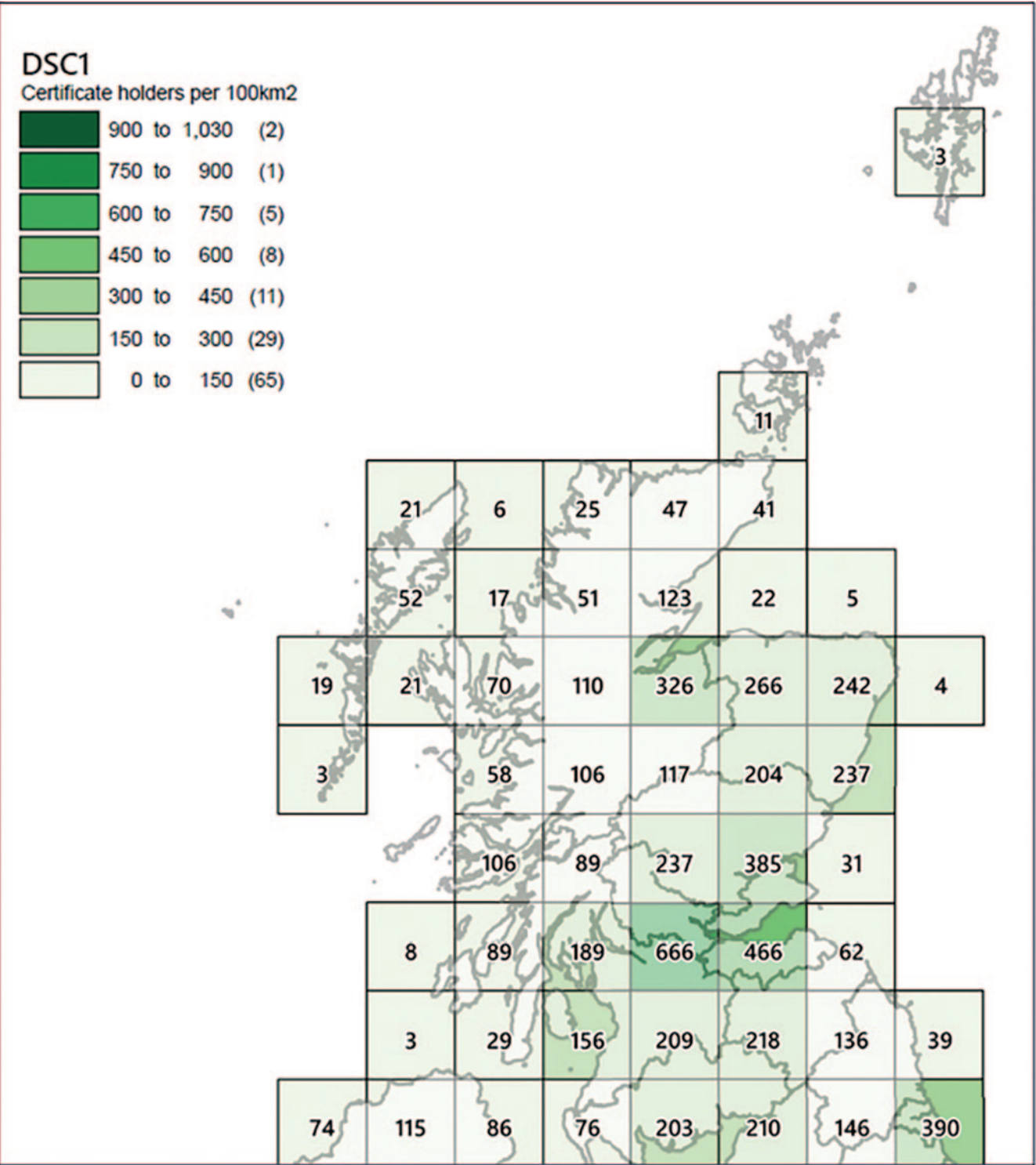
There are three key drivers for enhancing community integrated deer management:

**The Climate Emergency:** The Scottish Government have committed to a range of ambitious targets to confront the climate emergency, including **increasing woodland cover to 21% by 2032** as part of Scotland’s Forestry Strategy. Key to achieving this will be **decisive, flexible and resilient** deer management, where trained recreational deer stalkers in communities can make an important contribution. The local nature of community integrated deer management means there are **far fewer logistical considerations**, allowing stalking to take place **decisively and flexibly**. Management will also be more **resilient**, as evidenced by a recent Lowland Deer Network Scotland survey which found that recreational deer stalkers living in the same local authority area as their stalking ground were **least impacted by the coronavirus pandemic**. NatureScot have highlighted “the importance of having stalkers operating and controlling deer in their own area and **not having to travel distances**.”

**Land Reform:** Scotland’s pattern of land ownership is diversifying, and community buyouts are becoming more commonplace. Equipping communities with the **skills and expertise** to manage wildlife on their own land is an instrumental part of the land reform process, and will **avoid the need to outsource management functions** at considerable cost to community landowners. Enhancing a community’s capacity to harvest, process and consume or sell venison will be **economically stimulating** as well as **environmentally beneficial**.

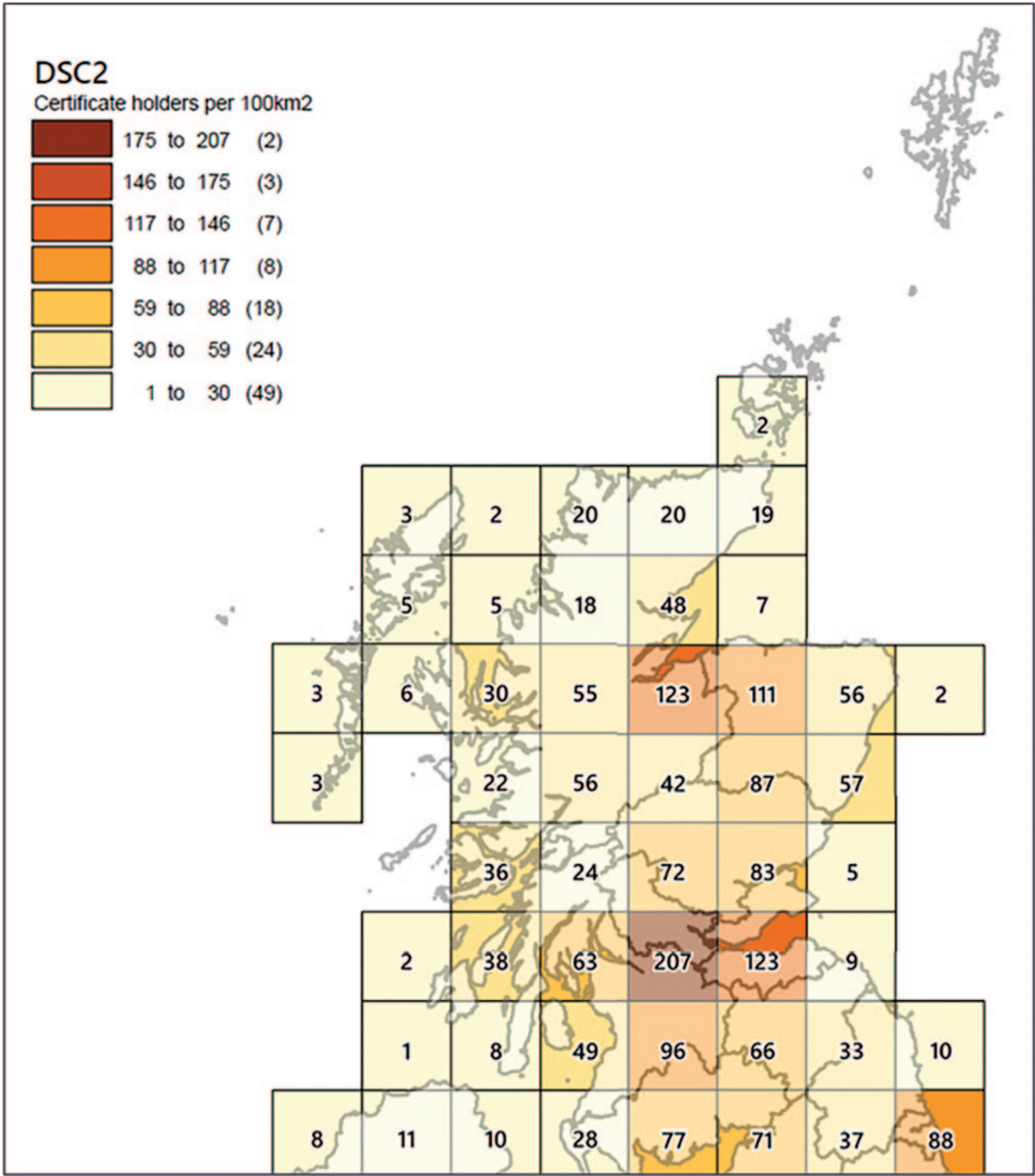
**Underused Recreational Deer Stalkers:** There are **26,300 firearm certificate (FAC) holders** in Scotland, a significant number of whom will already be involved in deer stalking. However, the number of recreational deer stalkers engaged in **regular** deer management at a **local level** is considerably lower, with many taking advantage of sporting tourism opportunities instead. If these recreational deer stalkers were given the opportunity to manage deer locally as well, a **considerable culling impact** could be made. Figures 1 and 2 highlight the abundance of trained recreational deer stalkers across Scotland in 2018 – **note the particularly high concentrations in lowland areas**. Regardless of land ownership structure, these trained recreational deer stalkers have significant value to add to the management of deer in the local setting, and could be hugely effective in bringing lowland deer numbers down if utilised more effectively.

Figure 1: Deer Stalking Certificate 1 holders per 100km² in 2018.



The latest data shows that 6,375 individuals have successfully completed the DSC 1.

**Figure 2:** Deer Stalking Certificate 2 holders per 100km<sup>2</sup> in 2018.



The latest data shows that 2,103 individuals have successfully completed the DSC 2.

## Underutilised Potential

Alex Preston's story:



"I consider myself an ordinary person. I'm married, I'm a Dad, I've got two lovely dogs and a career that's kept my head above the waterline for more than 30 years. About seven years ago I decided that – with five or so years of deer stalking experience already behind me – I'd look into the possibility of stalking deer on public land. My aim was to find a block of ground where I could sustainably manage a herd of deer or help control numbers depending on the management plan.

"Once I finally got my head around the concept of permissions (recreational leases) versus contracts, I decided I was in a position to tender for one or more of the recreational permissions. Every April I waited with anticipation as the lots came up. It wasn't long before it became apparent that I wasn't satisfying the requirements and very much playing in the wrong league.

"After seeking guidance from the stalking community, I spent the next few years gaining all the qualifications that I believed would open doors to some deer stalking. Convinced this was the way forward, I passed my deer management qualifications (levels 1 and 2), first aid with forestry, manual handling, food hygiene and quadbike certifications. I even made the move to copper bullets and registered myself as a 'fit and competent' person with NatureScot.

"In the years that followed, all but one of the permissions were simply out of reach. It seems the value of the stalking is not proportionate to the sport. This can only suggest that commerciality is driving the tender prices. There's very little playing field left for ordinary folks like me.

"In summary I've spent just under two thousand pounds, a heap of time, effort and sweat – and I'm no further forward than I was at the start of my journey. While I consider myself to be an ordinary person, I guess that it is not everyone that has the means to spend a couple of grand on one of their hobbies.

"I love my sport and the mindfulness it brings to me and, indirectly, my family. We eat what I shoot and I'm proud to be a responsible deer stalker. I'm not alone in this journey. I know lots of fellow responsible 'qualified' and experienced stalkers – all of whom don't have access to good stalking and would give eyes and teeth to experience some of the stalking that contractors get to experience.

"I suggest that in these sustainable times, it makes sense for the Scottish Government to tap into this rich vein of free resource. Let's adopt a model that opens up opportunities for all those above a certain benchmark. In the name of sustainability, I'd like to see the Scottish Government stand up for recreational hunters because – as it stands – it feels like everyone is against us."



## Underutilised Potential

### Duncan Howard's story:

"I started stalking about 20 years ago, and completed my deer management qualifications (levels 1 and 2) in 2008.

"At that time, I had lowland stalking ground through both a private sector body and what was then Forestry Commission Scotland (now Forestry and Land Scotland). My ground was all within a 25-mile radius of home. These were tendered for and held for a few years alongside a couple of bits of local ground that I had sole permission on.

"In 2011 my youngest daughter was born, giving me four children under the age of five and precious little time. I made the difficult decision to rescind my permissions and take a break from deer management to focus on my family.

"Since coming back to stalking in 2018, I have found it impossible to get ground from either of the bodies I previously had permission from – despite my considerable experience.

"The private sector body simply didn't return my calls and ignored any contact by email. Forestry and Land Scotland advised me 'contractors only'.

"Turning back to my local network, I have been able to obtain permissions on local farms. These are now shared between numerous stalkers, and the ground feels really quite saturated. I know of one permission (approximately 1000 acres) that has 14 people stalking on it.

"Aside from the pressure this puts on the local deer population, there could be some safety implications if ground becomes saturated in this way.

"The 'closed shop' with regards to lowland deer management on public land is detrimental on many levels, and while a free-for-all is not the solution, the bodies involved should give consideration to the role that recreational deer managers like myself could play."



## The Means

### Expand Opportunities on Public Land:

The expansion of deer stalking opportunities on publicly owned land will be a critical part of enabling community integrated deer management to grow and prosper. We envisage that the low-cost arrangements that already exist between many private landowners / tenants and deer stalking syndicates could be replicated on public land.

We understand that managing relationships with multiple syndicates poses a degree of complexity for public bodies. That is why **BASC is formally offering to become the official 'broker' between syndicates and the statutory agencies / local authorities responsible for managing public land.** Where agencies deem an area of land to be appropriate for management by trained recreational deer stalkers, **we would seek to establish a syndicate and will communicate with agencies on their behalf.**

It is worth noting that BASC already has experience of playing an intermediary role on the Island of Arran, where the land is managed by visiting trained recreational deer stalkers on behalf of Forestry and Land Scotland (FLS). We see no reason why such an arrangement could not be replicated with recreational deer stalkers living locally.

### How can the Scottish Government help?

- Ask FLS to **establish a pilot, low-cost community deer stalking scheme** in partnership with BASC to stress test the principles of community integrated deer management and develop a replicable operating model.
- Ask all statutory agencies and local authorities to conduct a review of their deer management leases **to identify landholdings which could be managed by recreational deer stalkers in the local area**, subject to the success of the pilot scheme.





## The Means

### Deliver Targeted Training to Communities:

We recognise that deer stalking is not a simple vocation to access. There are multiple barriers that must be overcome – from applying for a FAC and purchasing equipment, to completing deer management qualifications. These steps are predominantly driven by the individual, but there are steps that we can take to make the process more accessible.

Going forward, **BASC and The British Deer Society (BDS) will seek to provide targeted training to communities with a desire to manage local deer.** Communities with these deer management aspirations will be able to apply for a deer stalking certificate (DSC) 1 course to be delivered **at a discounted rate.** The course will be **delivered in the vicinity of the community** where possible. **We will also seek to actively promote the virtues of completing the DSC 2 course, and will connect candidates with qualified witnesses and assessors.**

The provision of targeted, discounted training will play a key role in upskilling communities with deer management aspirations. We recognise that simply obtaining a qualification does not make someone a highly proficient deer stalker. There is still a fundamental need to build up quality management experience.

To assist with this, **BASC and BDS will launch a dedicated deer stalking mentorship scheme that will seek to connect new stalkers with highly experienced and qualified individuals.**

A series of online and in-person seminars will be organised to share the insights of designated mentors, and we envisage that this will contribute towards the continuous professional development of new stalkers.

### How can the Scottish Government help?

- **Establish a community deer stalking bursary scheme** worth £5000 per syndicate to help recreational deer stalkers purchase specialist equipment in areas where carcass extraction and storage is challenging.
- **Establish a £250,000 deer management training fund** to enable BASC and other training providers to deliver the DSC 1 course to aspiring recreational deer stalkers for free.



A student receives a briefing from a BASC instructor prior to the DSC 1 shooting assessment



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## The Means

### Build Community Deer Larders:

Storing deer carcasses in a chilled environment is one of the foremost challenges facing recreational deer stalkers, who generally do not tend to have access to professional larder facilities. Many recreational deer stalkers have adapted in innovative ways by repurposing conventional refrigerators to store carcasses, but it is recognised that proper larder facilities would be preferable.

It is widely accepted that ‘area-based facilities’ – such as deer larders and purpose-built chillers – are crucial for the maintenance of carcass quality and ensuring a route to local market. Indeed, the Scottish Venison Strategy listed investment in such facilities as a key action point, and we were pleased to see the Scotland Food and Drink Partnership making £80,000 available for the Scottish Venison Association to develop demonstration sites for locally based chill and processing facilities.

Because community deer larders are not yet well established, **BASC will commit to trialling and developing best practice guidance for community deer larders as part of a pilot, low-cost community deer stalking scheme on public land.**

We consider this a golden opportunity to stress test the concept of community deer larders, which will complement the work already being undertaken by the Scottish Venison Association.

### How can the Scottish Government help?

- **Fund the development of a community deer stalking larder** at the pilot, low-cost deer stalking scheme on public land.
- **Establish a £500,000 community deer larder fund** subject to the successful trial and development of best practice for the trial community deer larder.



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## The Means

### Bolster Local Supply Chains:

Recreational deer stalking is often underpinned by the ‘one for the pot’ ethos, where harvested venison is processed and consumed by the stalker, family and friends.

This model should be actively sustained, but we believe that more should be done to make it easier for premium wild venison to be sold in local retailers – thereby avoiding the potential constriction of deer management by the available freezer space of the deer stalker.

We firmly endorse the ‘right product, right place, right time’ sentiment expressed in the Scottish Venison Strategy. Key to achieving this will be strong local supply chains, and that is why **BASC will commit to embarking on a sustained campaign to showcase the benefits of being a venison dealer to butchers and meat wholesalers across Scotland.**

It is hoped this will encourage more businesses to enter the market for processing and selling wild venison that has been harvested in the local area by local people. This will effectively build on the work already undertaken by the Scottish Venison Association, NatureScot and Scottish Craft Butchers to connect trained hunters with venison dealers and vice versa.





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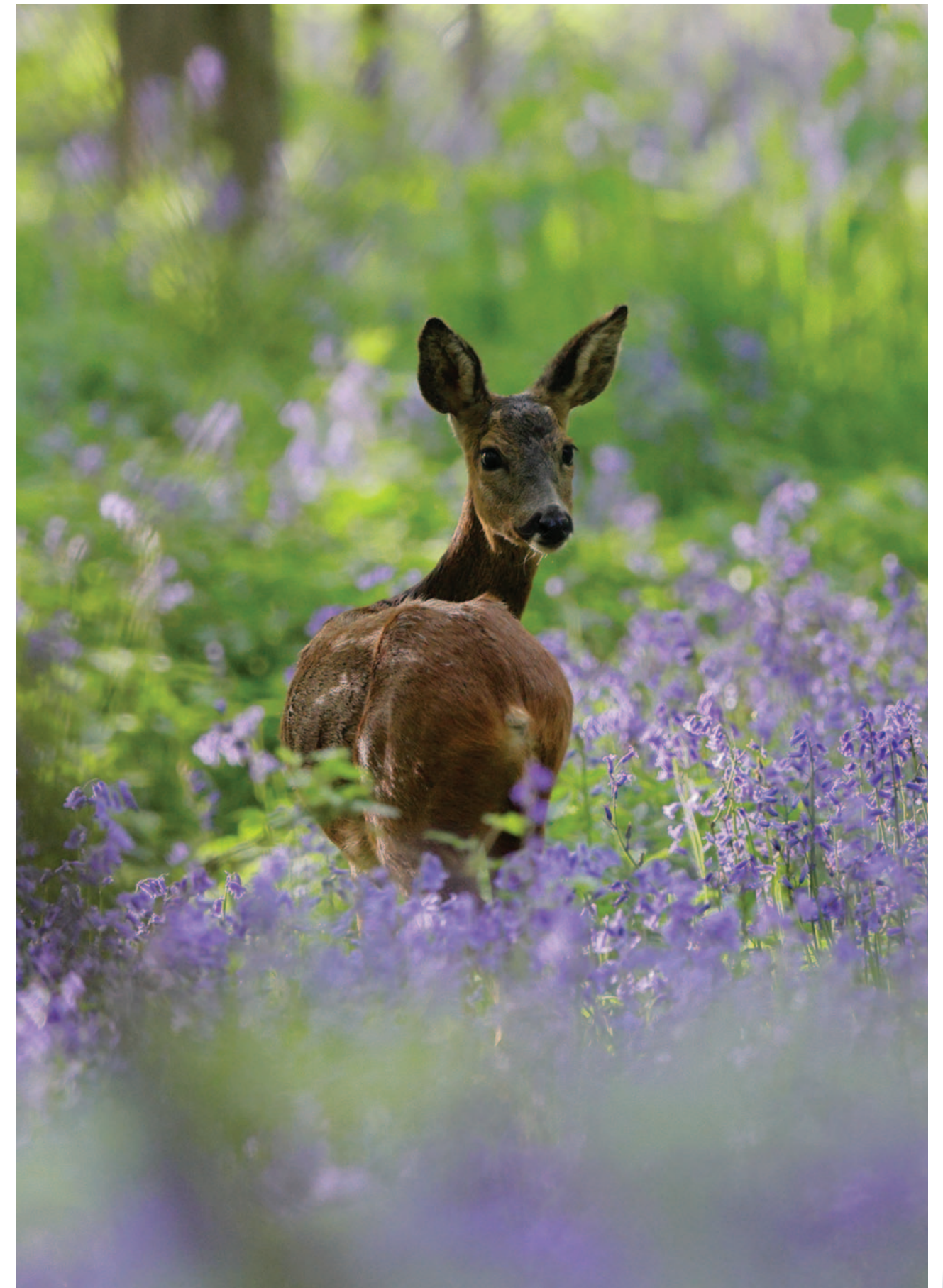
## Summary

### Our Commitments:

- We will commit to becoming the official ‘broker’ **between community deer stalking syndicates and statutory agencies / local authorities** responsible for managing public land.
- We will commit to **providing targeted training to communities with a desire to manage local deer** by delivering discounted DSC 1 courses and promoting uptake of the DSC 2 course.
- We will commit to **launching a dedicated deer stalking mentorship scheme** that will seek to connect new stalkers with more experienced and highly qualified individuals.
- We will commit to **trialling and developing best practice guidance for community deer larders** as part of a pilot, low-cost community deer stalking scheme on public land.
- We will commit to **embarking on a sustained campaign to showcase the benefits of being a venison dealer** to butchers and meat wholesalers across Scotland.

### Scottish Government Recommendations:

- The Scottish Government should ask Forestry and Land Scotland to **establish a pilot, low-cost community deer stalking scheme** in partnership with BASC to stress test the principles of community integrated deer management and develop a replicable operating model.
- The Scottish Government should ask all statutory agencies and local authorities to conduct a review of their deer management leases **to identify landholdings which could be managed by recreational deer stalkers** in the local area, subject to the success of the pilot scheme.
- The Scottish Government should **establish a community deer stalking bursary scheme** worth £5000 per syndicate to help recreational deer stalkers purchase specialist equipment in areas where carcass extraction and storage is challenging.
- The Scottish Government should **establish a £250,000 deer management training fund** to enable BASC and BDS to go further and deliver the DSC 1 course to aspiring recreational deer stalkers for free.
- The Scottish Government should **fund the development of a community deer stalking larder** at the pilot, low-cost deer stalking scheme on public land.
- The Scottish Government should **establish a £500,000 community deer larder fund** subject to the successful trial and development of best practice for the trial community deer larder.





# About BASC

The British Association for Shooting and Conservation (BASC) is the largest shooting organisation in the United Kingdom. Our mission is to promote and protect sporting shooting and advocate its conservation role throughout the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

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