

# CULLING TEAM CULLING

ENGLAND & WALES  
BEST PRACTICE GUIDES

the deer  
initiative

## Introduction

Deer are often culled by individuals operating alone but occasionally a team of deer stalkers is assembled for a particular purpose. The aim of this guide is to describe the factors to be considered when planning and implementing a team culling operation to ensure that safety and deer welfare standards are maintained. This guide links to the Moving Deer and Cross Boundary liaison guides.

Note: For the purposes of this guide the term “stalker” refers to a member of the team who will be shooting.

## Reasons for team culling

Using a team (2 or more deer stalkers operating together) can have a number of advantages:

- ◆ More efficient use of stalker time
- ◆ A team covers more ground than an individual
- ◆ Brings more resources than would otherwise be available
- ◆ Culling can be concentrated over a shorter period meaning less disturbance and the possibility of re-deploying resources elsewhere at a later date
- ◆ Large culls can be achieved more rapidly
- ◆ Can make culls more successful in difficult areas or at times of day when deer are not normally active (ie by moving deer)

## Principles

The principle of team culling is that two or more stalkers stalk, or sit out at vantage points, in the same area at the same time, covering more of the area than a single stalker could. In addition participants might arrange that deer were to be gently moved from inaccessible or unsafe areas to places where they could be culled<sup>2</sup>.

## Planning

Coordinating the efforts of a number of people requires careful planning, the main elements of which are:

### *Risk assessment<sup>1</sup>*

A risk assessment should be carried out. Parts of the risk assessment might be generic but there will often be specific risks to be taken into account in each situation.

### *Roles and responsibilities*

Clear command and control structures should be established. A coordinator for each team should be the sole reference point for changes to planned activities and they alone should make decisions affecting the team.

### *Safe arcs of fire*

A map exercise, confirmed on the ground, should establish safe arcs of fire, taking into account safe backgrounds, public access, thoroughfares and buildings. It may be necessary to use markers on some sites.



## *Communications*

Good communications are essential. All team members must be able to contact the coordinator and preferably each other, either directly or through the coordinator. Contact may be through a dedicated radio network or mobile phone. In areas of poor reception, contingency communication should be arranged. A pre-arranged emergency stop signal must be organised, given by radio/phone to individuals and/or to all at once by a loud horn/siren audible over a long distance.

All participants should have a means of telling the time.

## *Personnel*

Stalkers must be suitably experienced, this may include appropriate qualifications. It is helpful if they are familiar with the area to be culled.

It is sensible to confirm attendance on the evening before the cull in case alternative arrangements have to be made on the day.

## *Firearms and insurance*

Stalkers must use legal firearms and have the appropriate conditions on their Firearms certificate (FAC) plus third party liability insurance. It may be necessary to arrange for written permission to shoot for visiting stalkers.

Using sound moderators reduces disturbance.

## *Transport*

Transport must be arranged to get personnel into position and retrieve them afterwards. Separate transport will be required for carcasses.

## *Carcass processing*

Additional provision may have to be made for handling and storing larger than normal numbers of carcasses and for disposal of waste.

Each carcass will need to be inspected and meat hygiene standards must be maintained. If the carcasses are to be taken by a game dealer then "trained hunter" declarations must be attached. If the expected cull is large the dealer should be forewarned of this. Records should be kept and ownership of carcasses recorded if appropriate.

## *Follow up*

Contingency plans must be made for following up a wounded animal. A dedicated dog team that can operate independently when the cull is over is recommended.

## *Shooting positions*

Shooting may be either from vantage points with a safe background or from high seats. In both cases it is important that fields of fire are as clear as possible, especially close to the shooting position.

High seats are very useful for team shoots.

Additional seats may have to be arranged or existing ones moved or cleared. They should be inspected for safety, either annually if permanent or before use if newly erected.

## *Meeting place and briefing*

A suitable venue for a briefing should be arranged and the team made aware of the time and place.

## *Briefing*

All team members should be briefed on and understand their role, and the operational plan.

Each team member should be issued with a written summary of the briefing including a map marked to show the position and routes of other personnel and public access.

The briefing will include:

## *Object of cull*

Reason for the team cull, which age/sex of animals are to be shot and how many.

## *Making contact*

All team members must be able to contact the coordinator, and each other as appropriate. Radio contact must use agreed call signs, training in correct use may be necessary. It is helpful if communications are kept short and to the point, avoiding unnecessary chatter.

Everyone must be clear about the emergency stop procedure and about times and signals for when the operation begins and ends and when rifles can be loaded/unloaded.

## *Individual locations and/or moving position during the cull*

Everyone must know exactly where they are to be positioned relative to other participants, public access routes and buildings.

A name/code should be given to each rifle position and be known to them (use a copy of the briefing notes map handed to each participant).

Usually each stalker will remain in their position for the duration of the cull. If they are allowed to move from their position they must be clear as to when and by what route. High seats user should be warned to take care and to check the seat for safety before use. Individuals must be clear about transport to and from their position.

## *Firearms safety*

All stalkers should be aware of where they may and may not shoot and be reminded to ensure that they have a safe background before taking any shot. Rifles should be loaded only at times stated by the coordinator and unloaded at an agreed time or signal after which no more shots should be fired. Rifles must be unloaded when climbing up or down high seats. Firearms should not be left unattended unless locked out of sight with the bolt removed.

## *Use of hi-vis clothing*

This should be regarded as compulsory for the walkers when moving deer towards waiting rifles and for anyone else moving in the area during the cull. The minimum equipment is a tabard or jacket, ensure that these are of sufficient size to fit over normal outdoor clothing. In poor light a torch will be useful both to help find the way and to alert others of a stalkers presence.

## *Deer welfare*

Shoot at static animals only. Chest shots wherever possible<sup>3</sup>. Shoot within personal capabilities e.g. discourage long shots. Shoot only animals of the stated sex and age. For all shots taken at deer the position of the strike should be noted in case follow up is required.

## *Dealing with wounded deer<sup>4</sup>*

The briefing will include a strategy for dealing with wounded deer. If it is not appropriate for the individual to deal immediately with a wounded deer for reasons of safety, the coordinator should be referred to for guidance.

## *Dealing with carcasses*

Usually carcasses are left where they fall until shooting ceases. Stalkers must be advised whether they are expected to begin processing in the field or whether the carcasses will be collected and all processing done centrally.

## *Public access<sup>5</sup>*

Participants must be aware of where the public might be present and to inform the coordinator if a safety issue develops. If field processing of carcasses takes place grallochs must be disposed of in a manner that is unlikely to upset visitors.

Advise on procedure if approached by a member of the public during the cull, usually participants are asked not to engage in prolonged discussions and to refer the contact to the coordinator.

## *Paperwork*

Confirm possession of appropriate FAC and insurance, issue permission to shoot as appropriate.

## *De-brief*

It is often useful to hold a short de-brief session to build on experience gained during the team exercise.

## *Further Info*

<sup>1</sup> Risk Assessment guide

<sup>2</sup> Moving Deer guide

<sup>3</sup> Shot placement guide

<sup>4</sup> Follow up of shot deer guide

<sup>5</sup> Public liaison guide