

# **The Deer Initiative**

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## **Deer Management & Public Perceptions**

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Organised demand for access to the countryside can be traced back to 1865 with the founding of the Commons, Open Spaces and Footpaths Preservation Society and then the establishment of bodies such as National Trust (1895), the Ramblers' Federation (later the Ramblers' Association) and the Youth Hostels' Association (1930).

Politics has played its part in achieving greater recreational opportunities in the countryside, important milestones being the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act (1949) and more recent legislation in the form of the CRoW Act (2000) and the Land Reform (Scotland) Act (2003). However, the United Kingdom is one of the most densely populated countries in Europe with 89% of people living in urban or sub-urban districts, so arguably the urban taxpayer funds much of the underpinning financial support of the countryside; therefore legislation and provision for wider access might be seen as long overdue.

Along with changes to access, the doubling of UK forest cover from 5.8% to 11.6% of land use since 1947 has also favoured the expansion of deer numbers, with consequent impacts on farm crops, trees and wildlife habitats. In addition to the environmental impacts made by deer, there are also public health concerns regarding the transmission of bovine tuberculosis, the spread of ticks with associated risks of Lyme disease and a rise in deer-related road traffic accidents. These factors have prompted calls for the increased culling of deer, including more activity by recreational deerstalkers, with the potential for conflict with other countryside users, as highlighted by some landowning and shooting lobby groups.

A UK-wide survey targeted at informal users of the countryside, has provided detail of public perceptions of deer management policy and practice. Responses were received from a cross-section of socio-economic groups who provided information on the type, frequency and location of their activities undertaken in the countryside.

Views on the principle of deer management; social values relating to deer; favoured alternative control methods, including the use of predator species; preferred strategies for reducing road accidents; the sale of venison and the role of state agencies are reported. The perceived conflict or compatibility of

public access and deerstalking, risk reduction strategies and preferences for training standards are also included.

Conclusions are drawn that common sense, courtesy and public education on deer issues are important and form part of a wider responsibility of all involved in deer management. Deerstalkers should also recognise that they now operate in a changing rural environment and be prepared to adapt their practices accordingly.

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### **Speaker's biography**

Mark manages the University of Bath's HND in Countryside Management delivered at Wiltshire College. He trained at the Royal Agricultural College and the National School of Forestry, Newton Rigg. He has a Masters degree from the University of Wales and is completing part-time PhD studies at Bath. An active deerstalker for the past twenty years, he spent eleven years advising farmers and landowners before developing teaching and research interests in land use, deer and woodland management. He has advised the Countryside Agency on access closures for deer management under CRoW and presented research at the Sixth International Deer Biology Congress

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