



Sustainable Deer Management in Action



Chairman's Introduction

Since its creation in 1995, the Deer Initiative has had a lead responsibility for the sustainable management of wild deer in England and Wales. The DI is a successful example of a genuine public/private approach to addressing a national issue. Its independent nature draws together in a spirit of co-operation a wide range of organisations and individuals with an interest in the various impacts which deer have upon our environment. Core funding for our activities comes from the Defra family, the Countryside Council for Wales and Forestry Commission Wales, but members of the DI Partnership and other stakeholders also contribute significant in-kind support.

In 2007 we successfully negotiated new contracts with our major Government funding partners aligned to a revised vision and related strategic objectives. The commitment of Government remains firm and a funding package was agreed for the 3 years starting with 2008/9, and strengthened by the secondment of three members of staff from the Forestry Commission and one from Natural England. Our revised vision is for *the achievement and maintenance of a sustainable and healthy population of wild deer in England and Wales*, and the Corporate Strategy 2008-15 sets out in more detail how we plan to deliver this.

This year has seen good progress on each of the three



priorities we agreed in 2007. Contributing to biodiversity conservation, collaborative deer management has enabled a significant number of protected areas to improve in condition. The Deer-Vehicle Collisions Project, building on a database of recorded incidents and identifying accident hotspots, has been evaluating measures to reduce the number and seriousness of accidents, with a number of regional mitigation and driver awareness projects, and a major national awareness campaign in the pipeline. Disease control is

the third priority outcome; bovine tuberculosis (bTB) is of major importance and we have carried out surveys of wild deer in England and Wales and are helping to assess the risk to livestock.

The range of our activities has expanded with the launch of the Cumbria Deer Project in March 2008 (to address deer damage in protected woodlands mainly in the South Lakes area). We are also working increasingly with colleagues in Scotland, in particular on Deer-Vehicle Collisions and infra-red camera surveys (Thermal Imaging).

Sustainable wild deer management plays an essential part in the maintenance of the woodlands and other habitats that make the British countryside so special. By working on a landscape scale with landowners and land managers, we can help ensure that wild deer populations are healthy and sustainable, that they contribute to everyone's enjoyment of the countryside and to the economy of our rural areas, and that their negative impacts on issues as wide-ranging as biodiversity and road safety are kept to a minimum.

Jane Rabagliati, Chairman

Deer Initiative Partnership

Wild deer are both a national resource and a national responsibility. There are six species of wild deer in the UK (four of them introduced) and over the past few decades a combination of factors has led to a significant expansion in the range and number of all of them; a trend which is likely to continue. Wild deer regularly cross man-made boundaries, and so co-operation in their management is crucial. They can only be managed successfully through co-operation and collaboration between a wide range of interests, public and private,

statutory and voluntary. In particular it is vital to ensure the collaboration of local landowners and managers who can operate at a landscape scale.

The Deer Initiative Partnership has a broad membership (see right). The *vision* of the Partnership is for the *achievement and maintenance of a sustainable and healthy population of wild deer in England and Wales*. The Partnership meets to agree and endorse collective decisions which can then be implemented at a local level. It is supported by its executive arm, the Deer Initiative Limited (DI Ltd.).

The May 2008 DI Partnership meeting was held in Ashdown Forest, giving members the opportunity to visit various sites in the area and examine a range of issues from deer-vehicle collisions (the area has the highest incidence in the UK) to habitat impacts. The National Farmers' Union hosted the November meeting in Stoneleigh, which included updates on the Deer Research Working Group, the bovine TB survey and the suite of Best Practice Guides nearing completion.



Members of the DI Partnership in Ashdown Forest

Association of Chief Police Officers
British Association for Shooting and Conservation
British Deer Society
ConFor
Country Land and Business Association
Countryside Alliance
Countryside Council for Wales
Defra
Forestry Commission England
Forestry Commission Wales
Forest Research
Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust
Highways Agency
Ministry of Defence
National Farmers' Union
National Forest Company
National Gamekeepers' Organisation
National Trust
Natural England
Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals
Royal Society of Wildlife Trusts
Union of Countryside Workers
Veterinary Deer Society
Woodland Trust

Working at national level

This is the first year of implementation under our new Corporate Strategy 2008-15, which followed negotiation of new contracts with our major Government funding partners, aligned to a revised vision and related strategic objectives. The revised vision of the DI Partnership is for *the achievement and maintenance of a sustainable and healthy population of wild deer in England and Wales*. In delivering this we are focusing on three priority outcomes for the period 2008-2011:

- Contribute to the conservation and sustainable management of woodlands and other habitats; in particular, the achievement of favourable conservation status of protected areas such as Sites of Special Scientific Interest.
- Halt the growth of, and subsequently reduce, the number and seriousness of deer-vehicle collisions on our roads.
- Build the capability to react effectively to contain and control emerging zoonoses and other animal health issues relating to deer.

In November, GIS specialist Tim Hopwell joined the DI on secondment from Natural England to do analysis on a range of national and regional issues including deer-vehicle collisions, deer distribution and density, and disease surveillance.

Biodiversity conservation

Deer can have significant impacts on biodiversity where they are highly abundant, and in England and Wales have been a major source of damage to protected areas, particularly for woodland habitat. Natural England's report "State of the Natural Environment 2008" highlights the value of the DI's collaborative approach to deer management and the benefits for protected sites:

In 2005, of the 22,000 ha of woodland SSSI in England in unfavourable condition 8,000 ha (36%) was unfavourable as a result of damage by deer.

By 2008, this figure had dropped to 4,000 ha (22% of woodland in unfavourable condition), a significant reduction that is largely a result of regional activity, such as the Marches project in the Welsh Borders, led by the Deer Initiative.

Continued efforts by the DI Partnership and other stakeholders will be crucial in building on this success.

Deer on our roads

Traffic collisions involving deer present a major animal welfare problem in the UK, and lead to around 500 human personal injury accidents and several human fatalities every year. Increasing numbers of deer-vehicle collisions (DVCs) are also reported throughout much of Western Europe and North America.

Case Study

DINMORE HILL

Part of the Marches project, Dinmore Hill Woods is a 152.5ha Site of Special Scientific Interest (see map below) with large areas of native woodland in unfavourable condition due to deer browsing. The area has also been one of the worst deer-vehicle collision hotspots in the UK. With help from the DI, the Dinmore and Canon Pyon Deer Management Group has implemented a coordinated deer culling programme that has led to habitat improvements and a drop in road accidents involving deer. There will be continued monitoring of browsing impacts on ground flora diversity as well as assessment of damage to natural regeneration and coppice.

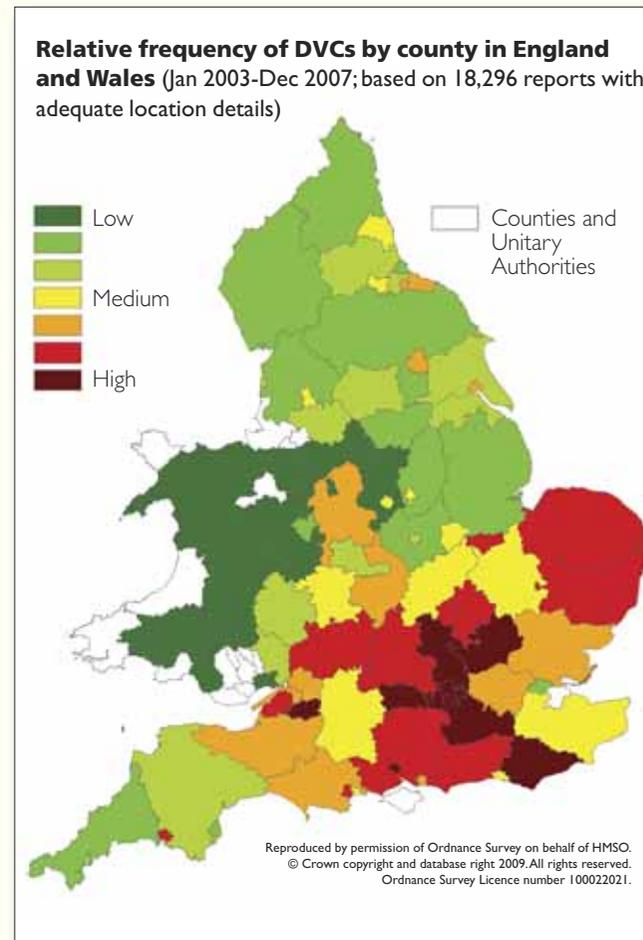


Working at national level

The UK National Deer-Vehicle Collisions (DVCs) Project was set up in 2003 through the Deer Initiative, with lead funding for the study coming from the Highways Agency and the Scottish Executive. The main aims of the project for the first three years were to assess the scale and distribution of the problem, and build a database to help identify hot spots and priority areas for mitigation.

By December 2005 over 30,500 records had been collated by the project, providing a good basis for national mapping. Comparison of data captured by differing sources has enabled estimation that the true toll of deer involved in collisions with vehicles in Britain is unlikely to lie below 42,500 and may well exceed 74,000 per annum. Over 80% of DVCs each year are recorded in England, with the highest frequencies in the South-East where traffic volumes are also greatest.

With ever increasing traffic and spread of deer into peri-urban areas this problem will continue to worsen unless concerted action is taken. Further support from the Highways Agency and the Deer Commission for Scotland enables continued monitoring of trends in DVCs, focusing on the best national data sources including RSPCA and SSPCA, road maintenance contractors, police accident records, and forestry and deer managers. The database now extends to over 50,000 incident reports.



Since 2005 the Deer Initiative project has focused increasingly on preventative measures, through media releases to raise public awareness (timed to coincide with annual peaks of DVCs during late autumn and

spring) as well as initiating trials to assess the potential of wildlife deterrents and interactive road signage.

Acoustic or optical wildlife deterrents seem ineffective under traffic conditions in England. For high risk sites the best results are likely to be achieved through working in close partnership with road authorities, forest and deer managers to develop local DVC prevention strategies. These should integrate those roadside measures most suited to the local situation with action to raise public awareness and management of the deer population. Further information can be found at: <http://www.deercollisions.co.uk>

To ensure that more action is taken on these research findings, we have set up a working group to develop proposals for raising public awareness of deer-vehicle collisions. This is chaired by Professor David Macdonald, the eminent conservation scientist and Founder-Director of the Oxford University Wildlife Conservation Research Unit. The group is planning a national campaign to inform and influence road users, to be launched in September 2009.



Professor David Macdonald

Working at national level

Animal health

Following extensive surveys supported by DI in the Southwest, in November 2008 Defra published two reports on bovine TB in deer. The first is the final report from the South West England and Cotswolds Survey of Tuberculosis in Deer; the second is a related quantitative risk assessment of the risk posed to cattle by wild deer.

The results of the deer survey show that on Forestry Commission land in the South West Peninsula, bovine TB is present at a very low level (less than 1%, except in one area where it is present at 3.8% in fallow). In the Cotswolds, high prevalences were found in two of the



South West Region DLO Norman Healy (right) leading a disease recognition course

three areas sampled (15.9% and 8.1 %) particularly in fallow deer. In all areas surveyed, fallow were the species most likely to have the highest level of infection with *M. bovis*.

The key results of the second report, the quantitative risk assessment, indicate that deer are likely to pose a lower TB risk to cattle than badgers throughout most of South West England and Wales.

While bovine TB is not currently a significant risk in wild deer, deer stalkers and managers should take the disease risk into account when establishing any management programmes. Defra and the DI will be working together to share this information with the industry and to help inform future plans.

Both reports can be found on the Defra website at: www.defra.gov.uk

Research

Sustainable deer management relies on sound scientific evidence, and one of the roles of the Deer Initiative is to develop the evidence base by reviewing, collecting and, where necessary, commissioning research and evidence-gathering on population dynamics, management methodologies and other fields. The Deer Research Working Group, chaired by Defra's Richard Brand-Hardy, brings together a range of stakeholders with different perspectives on deer

research to reach agreement on future research requirements. As well as the bovine TB deer surveys, recent research includes a study of deer impact assessments conducted for the National Trust, a review of deer density and habitat damage for Defra, and a report for the Deer-Vehicle Collisions Project on the effectiveness of the Ecolpillar acoustic wildlife warning devices. In March 2009 DI held a seminar in Thetford Forest on the current methods and equipment used in Thermal Image counting of deer.

Best practice

The South East Deer Liaison Officer (Jamie Cordery) continues as the DI's lead on qualifications and standards for deer management. This includes supporting Deer Management Qualifications Ltd and the Deer Stalking Certificates, providing chairmanship of the DMQ Quality Assurance Group, and supporting the LANTRA Game Industry Group, providing the vice-chairmanship.

This year has seen good progress on the Best Practice Guides which we hope will become the national standard (compatible with those developed in Scotland by the Deer Commission for Scotland). There are over 70 guides covering all aspects of deer management from impact monitoring to meat hygiene. Wild boar are also covered.

Regional structure

HEAD OFFICE

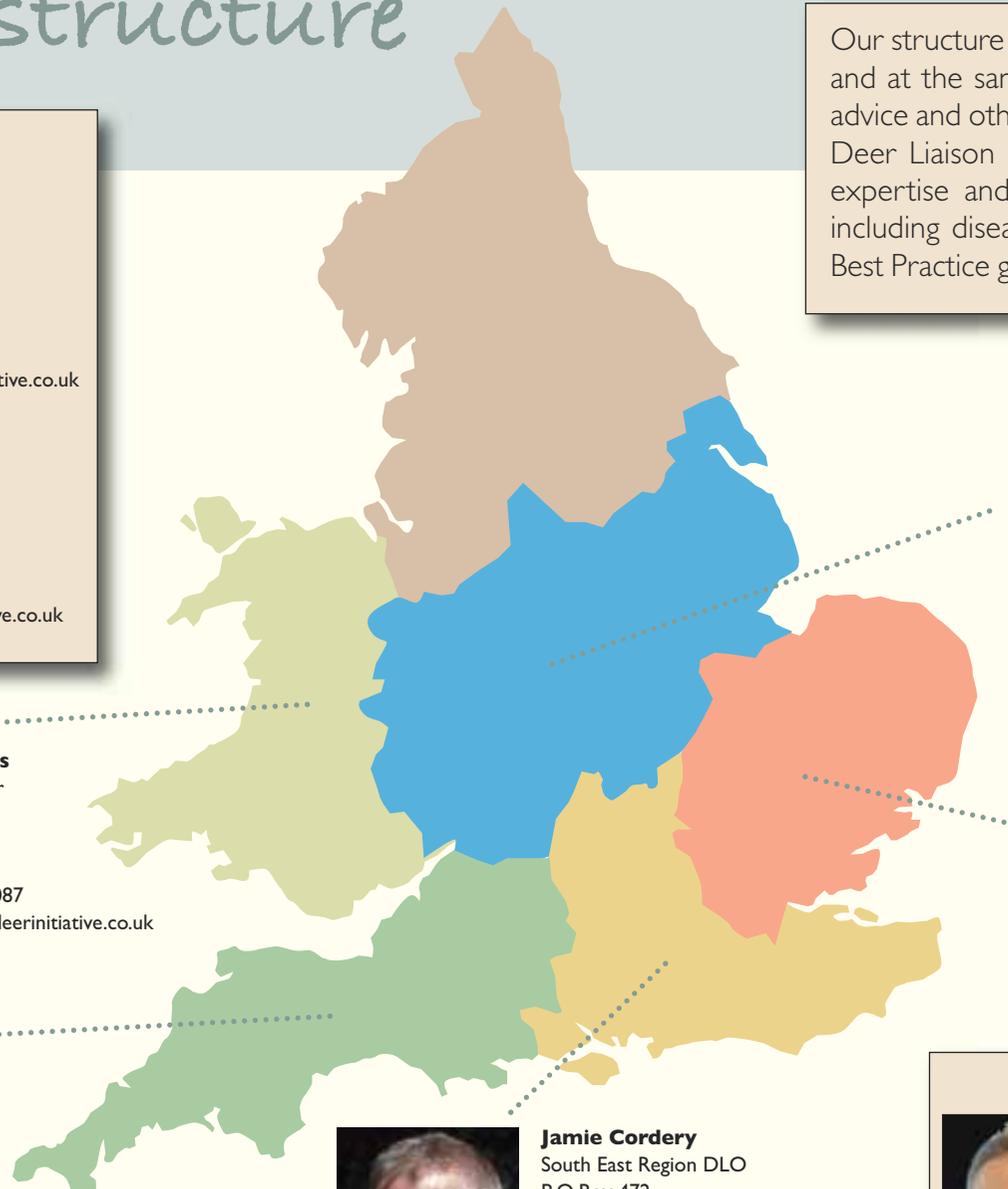


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Our structure enables us to maintain a strategic overview and at the same time be on hand to offer management advice and other support where it is needed. Our regional Deer Liaison Officers also play key roles in developing expertise and running projects of national significance, including disease surveillance, deer-vehicle collisions and Best Practice guidance.



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Working in the regions

CENTRAL REGION

In June this year Greg Jones succeeded David Jam as the Central Region's Deer Liaison Officer. The East and West Midlands projects continue to prioritise key woodland SSSIs affected by deer. In the west our Deer Management Advisor Patrick Faulkner continues to work with Greg, while a new partnership with Buccleuch Estates will increase deer management capacity in the east. Work with Natural England, the Forestry Commission and others has identified Priority Areas and 375ha of SSSI and ASNW (Ancient Semi-Natural Woodland) habitat negatively affected by deer.

For Priority Areas in the West Midlands, Dinmore has showed habitat improvements and a drop in deer-



vehicle collisions following increased deer culls; two SSSIs in Woolhope Dome are also showing improvement as a direct result of collaboration with local stalkers and owners. A successful collaborative cull was held in the Lower Wye Valley despite the challenging landscape.

In the east, numbers of fallow and muntjac deer remain unsustainably high in Rockingham Forest, contributing to declines in habitat condition. The project needs to cover the range of the fallow and affected SSSIs more comprehensively, but is currently focusing on the most critical zones. Ancient woodland restoration is likely to increase the need for deer management and the carrying capacity for deer in the longer term. Woodlands around Rutland Water are suffering locally severe

impacts from fallow and muntjac, but a new partnership approach and an extra Deer Management Advisor will address this issue.

Some areas outside the Priority Areas are experiencing increasing deer numbers (particularly muntjac and roe) and associated impacts. These also need DI support to develop landscape-scale co-operation, and in some cases to promote venison markets. Effective venison marketing is a key factor in delivering sustainable wild deer management, and with support from Natural England a Wild Venison Feasibility Study is being conducted by an external consultant. This will hopefully lead to a project to market and process wild venison on a local scale, to build on the success of Lincolnshire Wild Venison.

Working in the regions

EASTERN REGION

David Hooton, Deer Liaison Officer in the Eastern Region has provided advice and coordination support to a number of deer management groups, with successful increases in cull levels to start to meet landowner objectives. The driving factor for these coordinated culls is the increasing impacts to agricultural crops as well as the more traditionally recognised impact to woodlands. DI has also given support with infrastructure such as high seats and chilled storage, and helped with positioning high seats and ride clearance. Deer management in the region is attracting increasing interest from local media, with focuses on agricultural impacts, deer-vehicle collisions and woodland impacts.

About 650ha of woodland SSSIs throughout the region are adversely affected by deer. Increased deer



Rumble strip to raise driver awareness, Suffolk

management activity alongside increasing woodland management has resulted in an increase in the number of woodlands reaching favourable habitat conditions. Strategic fencing has also increased the effectiveness of management in the area.

Deer-vehicle collisions continue to be a major risk throughout the region. Three local areas have been highlighted as areas of particular concern. Work with Suffolk County Council resulted in a second rumble strip project (near Bury St Edmunds) to increase driver

awareness, and reduce vehicle speed in an area of high fallow populations. Another project has focused on the A47 with various proposals put forward. The third area, again with high numbers of fallow, saw a local meeting with road safety teams meeting local residents, landowners and partner stakeholders.

A new project has been developed to provide a training program in deer impact and activity monitoring, based on the system developed by Dr Arnold Cooke. This aims to deliver effective training for monitoring the effectiveness of deer management across the regions. The method will also be used to assess the success of deer related woodland improvement grant funding.

EAST OF ENGLAND DEER FORUM

A partnership of 23 organisations has been brought together to support and promote the sustainable management of wild deer in the region, working to meet national, regional and local land management objectives. The forum provides the opportunity to identify research requirements, identify future deer and land management priorities and challenges for the region, as well as supporting the broad aims of the Deer Initiative Partnership.



Working in the regions

SOUTH EAST REGION

South East DLO Jamie Cordery continues to support many organisations, private landowners and deer management groups across the region, including woodland forums and various local action groups. We are also advising on Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty plans and Biodiversity Action Plans, and assisting partners like the Forestry Commission, Natural England and the Woodland Trust with advice, training and technical support (such as thermal imaging surveys for the National Trust). This year we have supported the establishment of three new Deer Management Groups in the area.

The DI continues to work with Natural England, the Forestry Commission, the Wildlife Trusts, Butterfly Conservation and private landowners to help improve

the condition of SSSI woodlands identified as being in unfavourable condition due to deer (currently around 100ha). In spring 2008 all the project areas were visited by Judith Webb and Steve Cresswell on behalf of the Forestry Commission to monitor progress and to pick up on lessons learned.

Of particular note are Butterwood which surveys indicate is now likely to meet its SSSI targets, and Bernwood where fallow numbers seem to have reduced but are still high. There appears to have been an increase in muntjac numbers in some areas. Exclosures and impact surveys continue to show moderate to high impact across the main woodland blocks.

TYTHERLEY WOODS

The Tytherley woods project is one of two major landscape scale projects being coordinated by Butterfly Conservation in conjunction with the Forestry Commission and other partners. Deer are thought to affect the viability of woodland butterfly populations in a swathe of woodlands from Stockbridge Down to Bentley wood on the Hants/Wilts border. A deer awareness day was held in autumn 2008 to help strengthen deer management collaboration.

ASHDOWN FOREST

The Ashdown Forest is the worst area in the UK for deer-vehicle collisions, and the DI has supported the Ashdown Area Deer group since 2006. The scheme to deal with injured deer, supported by East Sussex County Council and Sussex Police, is now fully operational with good regional coverage extending across Sussex. A landowner survey was carried out with a view to discussing managing the fallow population in the spring of 2009.



Deer collision hotspot in Ashdown Forest

Working in the regions

SOUTH WEST REGION

In the South West about 750ha of woodland SSSIs are identified as suffering deer damage. The Ancient Woodland Working Group is the main focus for promoting landscape scale deer management in this region, under which run the 'Exmoor Ancient Woodland Project' and the Dartmoor 'Restoring Ancient Woodland Project'. For the Dartmoor project the DI has been promoting collaborative deer management through the development of a Deer Management Group, awareness days, and a series of talks on Best Practice. We have also helped the South West Forest develop a deer management project modelled on the DI's success in the West Midlands, and advised the Cotswolds AONB on deer management. The DI sits on various other working groups and committees including the SW Branch of ConFor, and the Quantock's Deer Management and Conservation working group.

A major area of research work this year was the SW bovine TB disease survey for Defra. DI also sits on the Defra 'Bluetongue Stakeholders' forum and the Exmoor National Park Deer working group. We have also supported the Rural Economy and Land Use (RELU) deer management project.

With the increasing profile of wild boar, SW DLO Norman Healy has studied wild boar follow-up techniques using tracking dogs (with Niels Sondergaard) and visited Germany to look at collaborative wild boar



management and follow-up methods used by the German State Forest Service. In spring 2008 we ran feasibility trials for the thermal image counting of deer in Dartmoor and Exmoor. Other events have included:

- disease recognition/carcase handling courses, with valuable help from Forestry Commission ranger staff.
- awareness days for the Dartmoor DM Project landowners and National Park staff, and for National Trust, Wildlife Trust, Natural England and Woodland Trust staff.
- a woodland assessment training day on the Natural England SSSI condition assessment method.
- In January 2009 the DI also supported the launch of the SW Forest initiative to promote wild venison to local butchers, hoteliers and restaurateurs.

Case Study

RSPB ARNE

RSPB Arne on the Isle of Purbeck is now 3 years into a 5 year deer management plan, which the DI has supported with advice and equipment (an all-terrain vehicle and new highseats for the 08/09 season). Working closely with partners and neighbouring landowners has included discussions with Natural England about using Higher Level Stewardship grants to fund deer management activities. The reserve is now beginning to see an improvement in both the condition of the habitat and body weight of the sika. Professor Rory Putman has produced a report for DI on deer management in the Purbecks that will inform the ongoing project.



Working in the regions

NORTHERN REGION

Funding through Cumbria Woodlands has enabled formal work in the region to take place for the first time, under the Cumbria Deer Project. The project was launched in March 2008 as a partnership between Natural England, the Forestry Commission, Cumbria Woodlands and the Deer Initiative. The project was set up to try and address the high levels of deer browsing which is causing damage to over 325ha of Sites of Special Scientific Interest (of which 275ha are woodland) mainly in the South of Cumbria. The objective is to



12 Alastair Boston inspecting deer damage in the Rusland Valley



Deer fencing in Grizedale Forest, Cumbria

improve the condition of these special woodlands, but matching the range of the deer we have been working on a landscape scale to benefit all the woodlands as well as other habitats in the surrounding areas. The project also aims to advocate, support and coordinate sustainable deer management whilst promoting venison within local food initiatives.

As well as helping to monitor deer numbers and their impacts, Alastair Boston, as Deer Management Advisor for the project, has been engaging with local deer groups, landowners and stalkers to raise awareness, identify concerns and gain support through individual contact, seminars, publicity and training as appropriate.

Practical deer management assistance in the past year

has been centred around the Duddon, Longsleddale and Rusland valleys. The project has also provided a mobile chiller trailer which can be moved to key areas for use during culling.

Looking forward to the next financial year the project is being expanded as the North West Deer Management Project, to cover all of Cumbria and Lancashire. Already we have facilitated the reformation of the Lune Valley and Arnside/Burton Deer Management Groups, both of which had been dormant for several years. The core of the work will focus on the SSSIs. It is hoped that the new project will contribute towards the Government's target of 95% of SSSIs being in a favourable or recovering condition by 2010.

Working in the regions

WALES

Evidence for deer impacts in Wales is building up. In November 2008 data from the Countryside Council for Wales showed negative deer impacts in 22 Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), centred mainly in the Wye, Elan and Elwy valleys. Our Deer Officer for Wales, Jackie Symmons, has supported deer management on around 80% of these sites. Commercial impacts appear to be most significant in the forestry sector.

Given the need to raise awareness of deer issues in Wales, we provide information and advice to landowners, manager and policy makers, attend a range of stakeholder events, and continue to produce an annual newsletter that is distributed to over 600 landowners and managers in Wales.

The DI in Wales continues to support existing Deer Management Groups including the Wye Valley DMG. A meeting was held this year to look at supporting landowners in a new area in North Wales. Support for Better Woodlands for Wales continues with the DI reviewing around 10% of applications and completing full Deer Management Plans for half of these.

With support from Forestry Commission Wales, we have been involved in the Welsh Assembly Government bovine TB monitoring project. We provided Best Practice training for carcase inspection

and sampling for bovine TB, and the project enabled a survey of fallow populations, revealing a number of areas with high deer densities. The project is being extended to the private sector. Research information regarding wild deer in Wales and their impacts has also been collated to inform future policy. DI in Wales has been working with WAG bovine TB team to advise them on deer management issues.

Future trends: research indicates that while problems with fallow in south Wales and the Wye valley are being addressed, mid-Wales is likely to be the next region where increasing deer impacts will be recorded. Information from the Marches border region also suggests impacts by roe, particularly across mid-Wales, is likely to be recorded more frequently. While some areas may be able to support an increase in deer numbers, monitoring of deer impacts will be essential to allow early intervention.



SCOTLAND

The Deer Initiative continues to work with the Deer Commission for Scotland and other organisations on specific projects. We collaborated with DCS on trials of helicopter and ground-based infra-red surveys (thermal imaging) for deer in peri-urban areas east of Glasgow, and Best Practice material is exchanged to ensure compatibility between DI and DCS guidance.

With core funding from the Highways Agency and DCS, the Deer-Vehicle Collisions project continues to be supported in Scotland, with continued monitoring and targeted awareness campaigns. The DI has also been assisting with the preparation for the July 2009 international Roe Deer Congress in Edinburgh.

Financial information

Funding summary

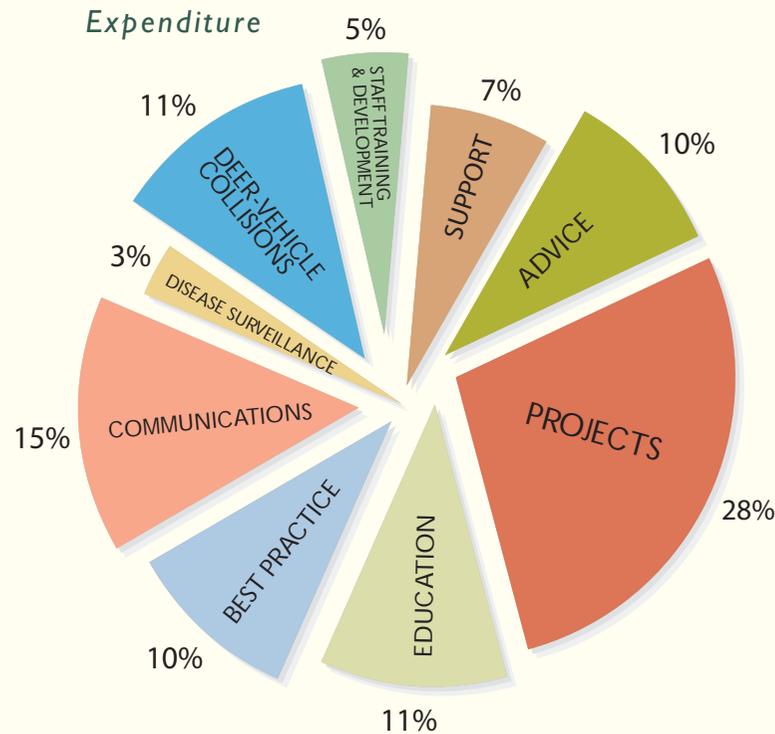
Income	2008/9
Defra 'family' ¹	169,348
Wales ²	28,841
Deer Vehicle Collisions	49,250
Regional SSSI Projects	112,146
Other Regional Projects	39,197
Animal Health	12,700
Other funding ³	12,621
Research	19,250
Seconded staff (IKS) ⁴	143,000
Total income	586,353

¹ The Defra 'family' comprises Defra, Forestry Commission England and Natural England

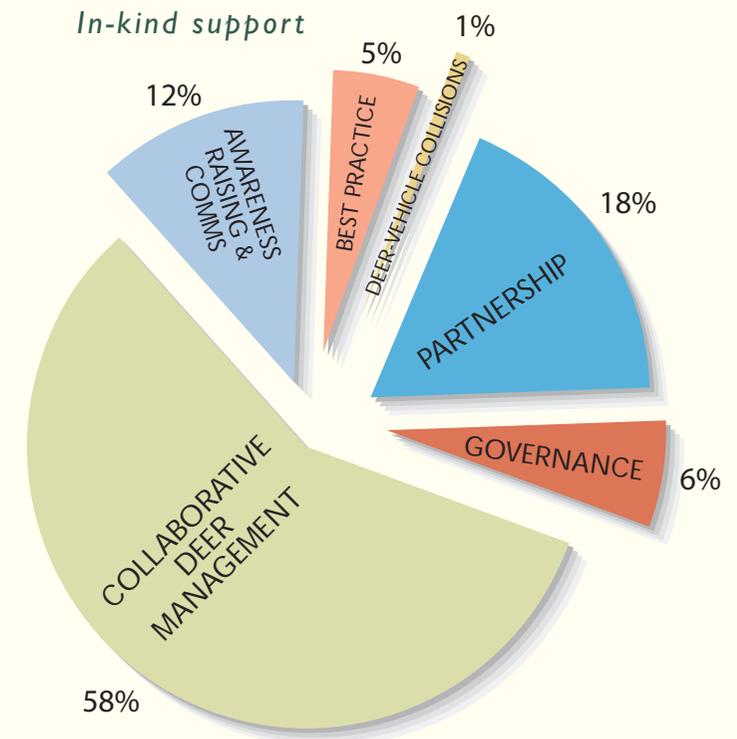
² Forestry Commission Wales and the Countryside Council for Wales

³ Including Partnership contributions

⁴ Three members of staff provided by FC and one member of staff provided by Natural England as in-kind support



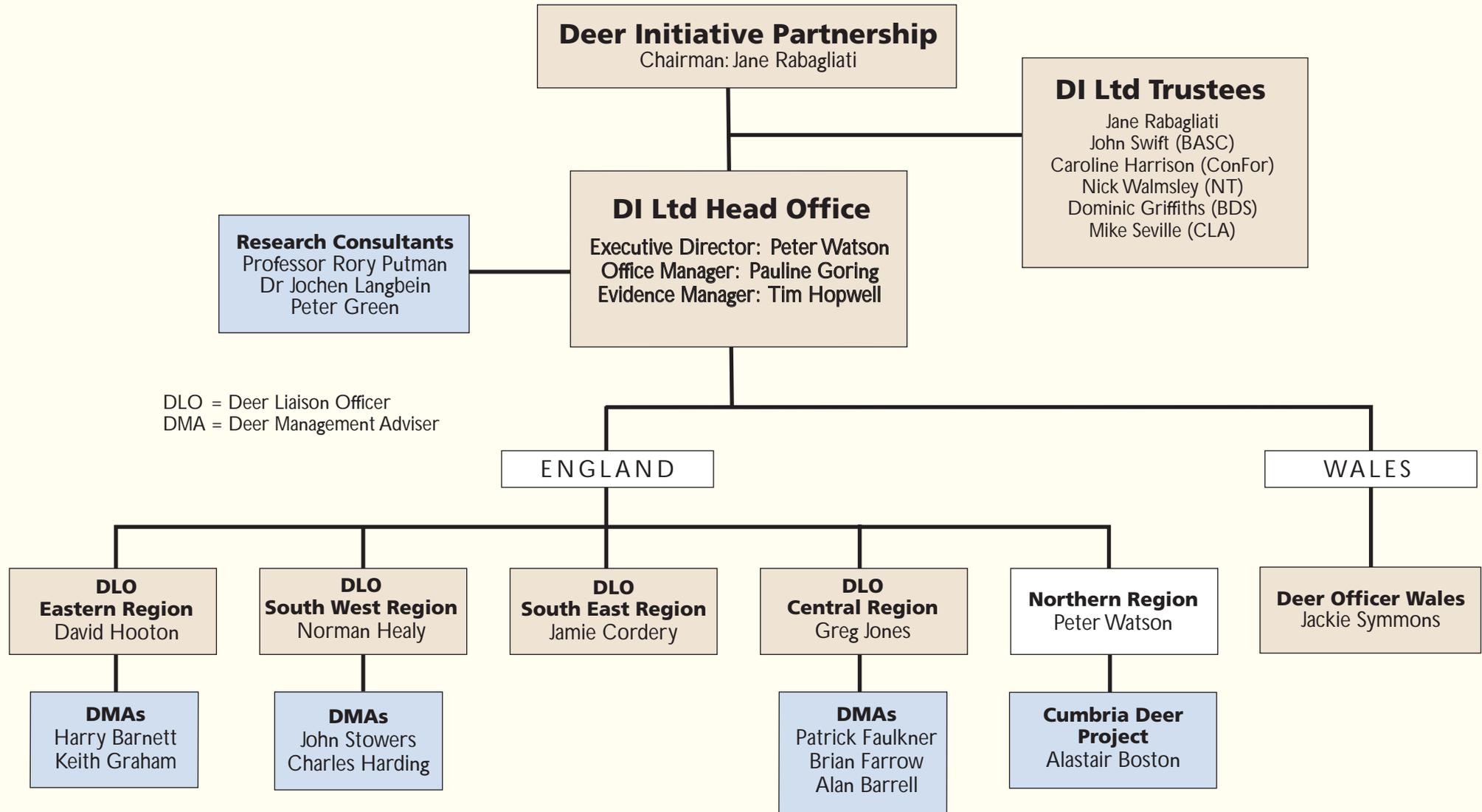
To properly represent the value of the work done by the Partnership, it is important to show the significant in-kind contributions of our Partners and other stakeholders. In 2008/9 we received in-kind support of about £300,000 for the areas of our work shown below.



The financial information presented in this document does not comprise the statutory financial statements of Deer Initiative Ltd for the financial year ended 31st March 2009, but represents extracts from them. These extracts cannot be expected to provide as full an understanding of the financial performance, financial position and financing and investing activities of the company as a reading of the complete Trustees Report and Financial Statements.

The statutory financial statements have been delivered to the Registrar of Companies and the auditors have reported on them; their report was unqualified and did not contain statements under section 237(2) or (3)20 of the Companies Act 1985.

Organisation for 2008/9



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