

CULLING MOVING DEER

ENGLAND & WALES
BEST PRACTICE GUIDES

the deer
initiative



Introduction

Deer moves are a form of collaborative cull involving a team. Whilst the general principles are the same as for any team culling operation, moving deer to static rifles is sufficiently specialist to warrant its own guidance. Both the Cross-boundary Liaison and Team Culling guides should be considered essential companion reading to this guide.

Terminology:

“walkers” – team members who move deer from one area to another

“rifle” - a member of the team who will be shooting, usually from a fixed position.

Why move deer for culling?

A deer move is a means of moving deer from an area that is difficult to access, to an area where they can be safely culled. Deer moves can also be carried out at times of day when deer are not normally active thereby extending opportunities to cull, this could be particularly useful during winter when days are short.

A deer move is not normally necessary where a well planned and applied cull programme is already in place, but could be useful where a reduction cull is required, or normal resources are insufficient to obtain the required cull.

Principles

The basic principle of deer moves is simple; walkers gently move the deer to where they can be seen, selected, and culled. The object is not to panic the deer by driving them, but for them to lift and move quietly with the least amount of disturbance, into an

area where they feel comfortable enough to stop and assess the situation. Rifles will be waiting in such places, usually at vantage points or high seats, overlooking a safe shooting area.

Organisation

A deer move is organised in the same way as any team culling operation¹ but there are a number of additional features:

Local knowledge

is critical for predicting how the deer will move, the route the walkers should take and where the rifles should be placed.

Briefing

A briefing is essential to ensure safe practice and to make the move efficient¹. In particular rifles must be aware of their precise firing points and safe arcs of fire. They must know which direction to expect the walkers to arrive from and to keep a good watch for them.

The walking team

The number of walkers required is not large. Even in dense cover they can be placed a hundred metres or more apart as long as they are able to stay in contact. In small areas a single walker could be enough.

Walkers should not have to make a lot of noise, an occasional tap with a stick is sufficient both to alert the deer and the waiting rifles. They must wear hi-vis clothing so that they can be seen by each other and the rifles. The pace should be a slow stroll.

It is important that at least the team coordinator knows exactly where to go but ideally the whole beating team will also be familiar with the area.

The rifles

The rifles should have a good track record as reliable, safe and humane shots. They should be experienced at selecting deer that may be moving towards them and be able to ensure that deer are stationary before they are shot and that there is a safe background. A deer move is no place for a novice unless they are directly supervised by someone more experienced.

Welfare

Deer cope easily with the degree of disturbance usually encountered on a deer move. It is not necessary to push them to the point that they are dangerously stressed, nor should they be placed in danger of accidents e.g. on roads.

Tactics

- ◆ It is said that deer prefer to move into the wind when disturbed but they will always have favoured routes which will be used irrespective of the wind direction. It is important to be aware of these routes and likely temporary havens, local knowledge is vital to success.

- ◆ When disturbed, deer will generally seek cover (although see next bullet point). Such places are usually not on rides or other open areas where high seats are typically sited, indeed the last place that a deer that has been disturbed probably wants to be is in an open area where it feels exposed. In areas of scattered small woods deer will often move readily from one wood to the other, crossing open areas to do so, but possibly not stopping on the way. Despite the temptation to cover all of the open areas it is usually most productive to place most of the rifles in the woods. This will mean that high seats may have to be moved or additional seats supplied for the day. Rifles in safe vantage points at ground level (not in high seats) can be very effective, it is important that rifles are aware of their precise location.
- ◆ In some cases moving deer out into a wide open space can cause them to hesitate long enough for a shot to be taken, but the ability to select and take an accurate shot is at a premium. Fallow will readily move out onto large fields but often place themselves well out of range of danger.
- ◆ Tactics vary with habitat. The scale of the planned move may be quite large and may involve a number of landowners, this is particularly relevant with herding deer such as red, fallow and sika. In large woodlands deer will often circulate within the woodland complex and may not leave the trees at all.
- ◆ In many circumstances it is useful to place rifles behind the intended direction of the move and to leave them in place for a considerable time after the walkers have gone through. The territorial species in particular may return quite quickly to where they started.
- ◆ Deer moves should not be carried out too frequently, successive moves can become less effective if the interval between them is short. A short de-brief can help to plan for the next occasion.
- ◆ Care should be taken to avoid disturbance before the rifles are in place and to ensure that rifles take their places quietly.

Further Info

¹ Team Culling guide