

# NGO Deer Branch

## Why we need the new NGO Deer Branch

By David Whitby, the NGO's Spokesman on Deer.

A GREAT DEAL IS HAPPENING IN THE DEER world these days. It seems that almost weekly both tabloids and TV are carrying a deer-related story. Those of us at the front line of deer management have been aware of burgeoning deer populations for some time. I remember some 20 years ago speaking of the inevitable march of muntjac, and given the does' breeding capabilities, their present and continued population boom is inevitable. Capable of conceiving at eight months old and mating again only hours after giving birth, this is an animal quite literally out of control.

Although I believe muntjac to be our greatest and most difficult problem, they are far from being alone! Practically all our deer species are cause for concern. Expansions in both range and population are evident in many if not all six species; the increased pressure on both flora, and indirectly fauna, is immense. Perhaps the relatively small numbers of Chinese water

deer should be eradicated before they too expand out of control. Do we really want another introduced species impacting upon our native plants?

The story of muntjac expansion and, to a certain extent sika, is slightly more complicated than that of roe, red and fallow. Both are relatively new introductions compared with fallow and, of course, roe and red are our only two native species. Both muntjac and sika are notoriously difficult to control. Although I have only limited and recent experience with muntjac, I have shot several hundred sika. I still maintain they are the most difficult of all our deer to stalk. Their acute senses and preferred terrain can be a real challenge, so achieving a substantial cull is both hard work and time consuming.

No doubt our generally milder winters have contributed to fawn/calf survival of all species; much welcomed re-forestation has also provided habitat and food, as

has an increase in certain winter crops. All these are contributing factors in the deer expansion story, but they are not the major reason for the explosion that has occurred in so many areas.

Left alone without predation or any form of control, the expansion of deer is not linear, but exponential. Rather like compound interest, their population increase follows no straight line. Think about it: 10 does all pregnant in year one, year two gives 20 deer, 15 of them female. Year three, with 10 mature females and five female young, we still have only 10 more fawns. It is year four that will start to give us larger increases; if my maths is correct, we now have 27 females, 20 of breeding age. Year seven gives us 70 females with 50 of them capable of breeding. Year 10 would, in the absence of any mortality, give us a total of 330 deer. Put another way, a population of 100,000 would, without any losses, equate to 3,300,000 a decade down the line.

Big herds of deer in the lowlands are becoming more common. This herd of roe in Dorset numbered more than 50 head.



SOPHIA GALINA

The reality, of course, is very different. Not 100% of does breed each year, especially yearlings. Add to this young mortality, road deaths, culling, accidents and disease, then naturally the final population is much reduced. What these figures do show, however, is a deer population's ability to expand rapidly if culling is reduced for a few years and that is exactly what has happened. Several years of low venison prices gave us several years of under culling. The effects at first were not too drastic but, as we have seen, the compound increase is now really taking hold.

There are only two ways to combat an expanding population of any living creature: reduce the birth rate or increase the death rate. Where deer are concerned, we simply have to shoot more females; there is no other answer to our problem!

The NGO has for some time been aware that its members manage more deer habitat than perhaps any other organisation. Most of the Keeper members and a good many of the Supporter members are deer stalkers. Clearly not all have been achieving their cull and, even if they have, then neighbouring areas have not. What are we going to do about it?

Following a series of meetings, your organisation has decided to establish an NGO Deer Branch (see page 17) to run along the very same lines as our specialist Moorland Branch. The initial brief is simply to provide better representation for NGO deer stalkers and establish a committee that will focus attention on the deer-related problems that currently face us.

The really welcome news is that the UK Association of Professional Deer Managers (UKAPDM) is to join the



LINDSAY WADDELL

We hope NGO members with an interest in Scottish deer will also join our Deer Branch.

NGO. This organisation was established 12 years ago to represent full-time stalkers. Its membership boasts some of our most experienced stalkers, most with at least 30 years' experience. Though small in number, this group will have a massive impact when it comes to non-nonsense, practical solutions to the deer-related problems that our Deer Branch will address. These are people that have made their living in the deer world for many years, not easy at the best of times! I look forward to their involvement, welcome their expertise and applaud their decision to join the NGO.

The first meeting of the deer branch of the NGO will be held prior to this year's AGM on 27 March at 10.30am at Ufton Court near Reading. The intention is to form a Deer Committee. From this, the NGO hopes to use its considerable stalking membership to achieve some solutions to the deer-related problems

before us. All people interested in being involved please attend.

No-one can deny the immense success that the NGO has achieved over the last decade. We represent this country's gamekeepers at every level. The abundant successes have been achieved by the hard work of a PR consultant, an extremely efficient secretary, national co-ordinator and many, many unpaid keepers and helpers. The one thing that all have in common is the belief that the NGO is the best vehicle to represent the gamekeeping profession! Now it is the turn of our deer stalkers: can we achieve the same degree of success? We have established a problem and undoubtedly have the expertise to address it. Only time will tell if we have the commitment. Let us look to the NGO moorland branch as an example. Who better than the NGO to formulate and implement policy for deer on the land that its members manage.

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