

Survey of deer distribution and abundance

As indicated in the Chairman's Notes, the Society is about to launch a new-look survey of deer distributions across the UK, upgrading our methodology in order to try to gain additional information on relative abundance of each species present in different parts of the country. We are looking to our members to collect information on deer density in a selection of sites around the country. By linking abundance data with various characteristics of the surrounding habitat and landscape structure in any given geographical region, we will also seek to identify relationships between deer density and environmental character in each area, which will enable us to fill any gaps in our sampling and to extrapolate the density and abundance of deer across the whole country.

The way the survey will work

Each volunteer will be allocated a map square (1km square) close to where they live. In order to obtain an estimate of deer densities and numbers that can be extrapolated across the whole country we must sample randomly within a number of different environments, rather than specifically target areas where we know deer to be present. Therefore, when you are allocated a survey area do not worry if certain woods are not known for great deer abundance; for consistency these must be surveyed as well as woods where deer are known to be abundant. If you stalk regularly within the area, you may volunteer to carry out the survey in a survey area which is already familiar to you. We will provide a base Ordnance survey map showing this map square.

For the survey itself we will ask volunteers to select at least one woodland within your allocated 1km square. The wood may be large or small, may have high densities of deer, low density, or no deer at all. In practice, you may need to visit all woodlands that are at least in part within your 1km map square. You will be visiting this area a number of times at the end of winter (during March/April) and again in late summer (August/September).

Surveys

As noted, we will provide each volunteer with a 1:2500 scale map of your 1km square



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and surrounding area. If the map is out of date and woodlands shown are no longer present or have altered size or shape, or if new woodlands have been established since the map was produced, please amend the map to show the current status of woodlands in your 1km square. Please also mark on the map all field boundaries within your survey area, and during a visit to the area in late summer, colour in all woodlands and fields according to type (coniferous, broadleaved or mixed woodland; pasture fields, cereals, root crops or set-aside). Colour the maps clearly and remember to attach a key showing what each colour represents. This will provide background habitat data to correlate with observed deer numbers/density so that we can extrapolate probable deer densities in other areas based on environmental structure.

We would ask you then to visit your survey area on four occasions during March/April (four evenings, separated by at least one week between visits) and again for four evenings during August/September. These visits will be to record sightings and signs of deer and deer activity; they may be on weekdays or weekends and will ideally be a mixture of the two. A checksheet will be provided on which you can mark the numbers of deer of each species seen out in the open and also record the number of 'racks' (or trackways) crossing the woodland edge. And that's about it.

For the real enthusiast, however, we will also give instruction on how to carry out surveys for deer dung in your target woodland, which offers an alternative way of assessing relative density.

This is a real opportunity for members to learn new skills, or hone up old skills, in making some formal census of the deer populations in their own home area, while at the same time helping the Society as a whole build up a better picture of distribution and abundance of each of our main deer species. We hope as many of you as possible will volunteer to join in. Collation of objective data of this kind is essential if we are going to be in a strong position to influence future policy and as noted, learning to apply these methods may help in future census of deer population numbers and trend in your own stalking areas.

Methods to be used on open hill ground in the Scottish Highlands will be somewhat different from those described here and may depend more on the regular counts already undertaken within most Deer Management Groups, but we will still seek Scottish volunteers as coordinators, and most assuredly will want volunteers for the Lowlands.

The survey will be advertised again in *Deerbytes*, but we would ask anyone interested in volunteering to register that interest with Charles Smith-Jones at technical@bds.org.uk

