

The British Deer Society Enclosed and Captive Deer Survey 2017

27.7.17

At the BDS AGM weekend in May 2017 Dr Peter Green, the Society Hon. Veterinary Advisor, gave an illuminating overview of the status of deer parks and farms and discussed the grey areas that link wild and park deer in particular. While the BDS has always primarily been concerned with the former, it has become clear that all deer in Britain bring with them common issues. As a result, to compliment the five-yearly survey carried out by the Society to plot the presence of wild deer in Britain, work has been ongoing for a while to consider creating a register recording all places where deer, whether otherwise present in Britain or not, are held in captivity.

Although the Society focuses its attention upon wild deer, one of the foundation elements of the Society's charitable status is the welfare of deer. Free-ranging wild deer do not come under the terms of the Animal Welfare Act 2006, but enclosed deer do fall within the scope of this legislation. Moreover, deer kept in deer parks are considered to be wild and enter the Wild Game meat trade, not the Farmed Game route. Deer in deer parks therefore fall squarely within the remit of the Society.

Only two members of the *Cervidae* are required to be licensed in captivity under the Dangerous Wild Animals Act 1976, the moose or European elk *Alces alces* and wild forms of the reindeer or caribou *Rangifer tarandus*. Domestic forms of reindeer are specifically exempt. Otherwise, currently, there are no centralised records of captive deer across the UK.

This Survey is an ambitious undertaking which will create a unique record of huge national importance. Although the late Kenneth Whitehead published a report of all deer parks known to him in 1950, and the exercise was repeated by Frederick Hingston in 1988, since that time there has been no organised effort to identify and record populations of enclosed deer.

At one end of the scale the results will provide a publicly available record of where particular species can be viewed, whether in parks, zoos or other collections, but its value will extend far beyond that. The Society is aware that there is little reliable information about the numbers or distribution of properties or land holdings where deer are kept enclosed or captive, nor about the species and numbers of deer confined within these properties. Because of its widespread membership and the obvious interest of members in deer generally, the Society is very well placed to harness the local knowledge of its membership in identifying and logging land holdings where enclosed or captive deer are present.

Importantly, a national register will enhance our ability to react intelligently, and in a timely manner, to outbreaks of diseases affecting deer. Furthermore we will be better placed to recognise any potential for the establishment of new feral populations through escapes, and of course be able to confirm records of any endangered species present within the UK – this in itself will have great international value. The register will form a ready and verified source of available research resources, and allow the BDS to respond quickly to enquiries from official sources, media, researchers and the general public. Finally, it will enhance a recognition that enclosed and captive deer come under the terms of the Animal Welfare Act and that owners and managers are responsible for their welfare.

To create the register we need only some basic information and this is where you, the members of the BDS, come in. We need to know of any establishment in England, Wales, Scotland or Northern Ireland where deer are held captive or enclosed; this can include zoos, parks, farms or private collections, and the only criteria is that they are contained within a deer-proof boundary. A short

form with notes for completion is available through the BDS website. Don't worry that you may be duplicating other reports – we would rather have multiple submissions for the same establishment than none at all! There is no need for you to approach the establishment yourself – if we have any further questions this will be done by BDS staff. Ideally you will be able to send the form electronically by email to the address on it, but paper copies will be equally welcome.

The results will be held by the BDS and only details of those establishments with public access will be made available through the BDS website. So, for instance, if you want to see an elk or a rusa deer, you will be able to search for the location closest to you. Other places with no public access will be held on the register but not made available for general viewing.

There is no doubt that the register, once completed, will be large – there are probably several hundred premises where deer are enclosed – but its benefits will be enormous. From the Society's point of view, the BDS will become the recognised authority for recording the presence of all deer, wild and captive, in the UK and there will be a host of other benefits. At the very least the welfare of enclosed deer can only be enhanced, a worthy objective in its own right.

Please take a few moments to report enclosed and captive deer near you, and help us to help deer.