



BRITISH DEER SOCIETY POLICY STATEMENT

Use of Handguns to Kill Deer

1. Background

- The British Deer Society (BDS) is primarily concerned with the welfare of wild deer. The Society's stance in this Policy Statement reflects this aim.
- National legislation specifies minimum rifle calibres, bullet types and ballistic properties for the shooting of uninjured wild deer. It also permits the use of shotguns for uninjured deer, but only under very specific circumstances.
- For the dispatch of injured deer, the law permits the use of any firearm, even if below the normal legal requirements for uninjured deer.
- Farmed deer are not subject to the provisions of wild deer legislation, although park deer generally are.
- The ownership and use of all firearms normally requires the authority of a Firearm or Shotgun Certificate as appropriate. Any applicant for any firearm must demonstrate 'good reason' to possess. The issuing authority will examine whether the applicant has demonstrated good reason on a case by case basis.

2. Definitions

Legal. Legal definitions of firearms and conditions for their ownership and use are contained within the Firearms Act 1968, Firearms (Northern Ireland) Order 1981, and relevant subsequent amendments, additionally in the Deer (Scotland) Act 1996,, as amended, and the Scottish Statutory Instrument Deer (Firearms) (Scotland) Order 1985, No 1168 (S.94).

Handgun. For the purposes of this Policy Statement, a handgun can be generally defined as any short barrelled firearm designed to be fired using only one hand, discharging a missile or missiles that travel in free flight ('free bullet'). Common types include revolvers, semi-automatic or 'self-loading' pistols, long barrelled pistols and bolt action deer calibre handguns. Such firearms are classified as Prohibited Weapons under Section 5 of the Firearms Act 1968 and it is the responsibility of the Chief of Police to decide whether an applicant has sufficient good reason to possess one.

Captive-bolt device. An instrument used in animal slaughter that projects a restrained piston for a short distance, normally no more a few inches, beyond the end of the barrel. These do not require a Firearm Certificate (FAC).

Slaughtering Instrument. Handguns which have been modified for slaughtering at close quarters are frequently reclassified on a FAC as a 'slaughtering instrument'. Such modifications may include



the restriction of magazine or cylinder capacity, or the porting of barrels to allow the safe expansion of gases where the barrel is placed against an animal's head.

3. **BDS Position**

Uninjured deer. The BDS believes that, for the purposes of deer management, the equipment employed must be the best available to enable the placement of a single, lethal shot with as small a margin for error as possible. This is deemed to be a full-bore rifle with appropriate telescopic sight. BDS will not endorse the use of handguns for the shooting of uninjured wild deer, even if they are in deer stalking calibres and able to meet the legal minimum ballistic capability. If a deer is inadvertently wounded, the hunter should dispatch it as soon as possible with another shot from the firearm already being carried. BDS does not believe that the additional carriage of a handgun is necessary for this purpose.

Injured deer.

- Many deer are injured (other than by hunting) and require to be dispatched quickly and humanely – road traffic accidents are a common example. In such cases BDS believes that any available firearm which can be used safely at close range is appropriate to end the deer's suffering. This includes any shotgun and any size of shot, or rifles which would not normally be permitted for the shooting of healthy deer.
- For close range humane dispatch scenarios, the BDS specifically recommends the use of small calibre shotguns discharging small shot pellets, which deliver energy very effectively at close range and with a rapid loss of energy thereafter.
- Veterinary surgeons, professional wildlife managers, those involved regularly in formal HAD Schemes and others may have access to free-bullet pistols or captive-bolt devices and BDS supports the use of either for the humane dispatch of injured deer which can be closely approached providing that the user is suitably proficient and authorised.

Farmed deer. Although it is legal to kill farmed deer, which are accustomed to being handled, in the field with a rifle, such deer are often moved to another more suitable location to be killed. Under such closely controlled circumstances BDS has no objection to a legally held handgun being used as a slaughtering instrument. If the deer are not closely restrained, however, BDS believes that the use of an appropriate rifle is essential.

4. **Summary**

The BDS firmly believes that the most suitable firearm for shooting uninjured wild deer should be a full-bore rifle (with calibre and ballistics as prescribed by law) ideally equipped with a telescopic sight to aid precise aiming. For injured deer, a full-bore rifle remains the preferred option if the deer is mobile, and a shotgun if immobile.