

Woodland Ecosystem Group Priority Action Brecon Beacons Woodland Red Deer Management

Summary

Deer and their impacts

Wild deer are still considered a rarity by many people in Wales, but numbers are increasing and they are now more common and widespread in Wales than at any time in recent history.

Deer are herbivores and when at high densities can have significant negative impacts on forestry and woodland, priority habitats and protected sites. Significant localised impacts on agriculture have also been recorded.

Red Deer in the Brecon Beacons National Park

In an area that lies between Fan Gihirych, Fan Nedd and Fan Dringarth and drained to the north by the Crai, Trewreyn and Senni valleys a population of Red deer are affecting the condition of semi-natural broadleaved woodland.

Red deer are frequently seen by local landowners in the immediate location (shown on the map), but also over a much wider area. They are regular visitors entering woods on farmland during winter and spring and foraging on adjacent pastures. There is some management of the deer but it is not co-ordinated. The deer are using local woodlands for cover/shelter and foraging. The evidence of browsing damage is clear and this is affecting the long term regeneration of these semi-natural woods. Conifer woodlands in the area may also be used.

Without deer management the character and structure of the native woodlands will be affected and their resilience to threats such as climate change will be reduced.

Required Action

- Preparation of Deer Management Plan
- Implementation of Deer Management Plan

What do we mean by “deer management”?

Deer do not respect land ownership boundaries and the herding deer species in particular (red, sika and fallow) need to be considered and in some instances managed at a landscape scale. This often requires cooperation between a number of landowners. Normally the first stage would be to gauge the need for deer management in the area, and this would involve an assessment of actual or likely damage, and the numbers of deer in the area.

Deer Management Plans are the key tool in setting objectives and management actions. The range of actions includes:

- *Population assessment and impact monitoring*
- *Direct population management: controlling numbers*

- *Adaptation: forest and woodland design, and changing tree establishment techniques*
- *Protection: physical protection such as fencing, and chemical deterrents or scaring devices.*

To ensure high standards of safety, deer welfare and food-hygiene, the industry has developed a comprehensive set of Best Practice Guides (available on the Deer Initiative Partnership website www.thedeerinitiative.co.uk).

This local issue is just one example of deer impacts on native woodland and is not limited to this locality. Where deer of any species are impacting woodland condition then assessment should be carried out and management considered.

Useful links

The Welsh Government's strategy for Deer – Wild Deer Management in Wales
<http://www.forestry.gov.uk/forestry/infd-8czed6>

Advice on management and best Practice
<http://www.thedeerinitiative.co.uk>