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EDITORIAL

John Fletcher

I AM WRITING FROM A SCOTLAND BRIEFLY GALVANISED INTO POLITICAL ACTIVITY BY THE INDEPENDENCE REFERENDUM. HOWEVER WITH ONLY THREE DAYS TO GO I AM WILLING TO PREDICT THAT THOSE VOTING FOR THE STATUS QUO WILL WIN THE DAY AND EVERYONE WILL SOON BE ABLE TO REVERT TO BUSINESS AS USUAL.

Still, for Scottish deer farmers there remains excitement. Largely due to the efforts of Dick Playfair of the Scottish Venison Partnership we have had an excellent series of open days at Ali Loder's deer farm in Aberdeenshire. We have had four, all are free of charge and have been well attended. The last this year is on November 11th. Next year there will be five more with the emphasis moving towards deer parks rather than farms. Dick, Alan Sneddon and myself have been working away to advise new deer farmers and we have a significant number of new starts now with the potential to be farming several thousand hinds in a couple of years. If this growth continues we may be able to really make progress in meeting and developing the growing venison market.

Inevitably these new deer farms create a shortage of quality breeding stock. So far we have been able to keep prices within reasonable limits and short of the level at which the capture of wild hinds might become worthwhile. Most of the hinds are being located within Scotland because of the uncertainty over tuberculosis in many parts of England. Scotland is internationally accepted as officially tuberculosis free but there is no possibility of introducing measures to require deer entering Scotland to be tested.

In the spring of this year the Veterinary Deer Society organised a conference around the theme of tuberculosis and the available tests for the disease in deer. Apart from the official skin test, several new tests were discussed. Presentations were made by those working with the Enferplex test from Ireland, the Statpak and associated DPP developed in the USA, the use of a sophisticated development of the skin test with a control that has been pioneered in Spain, and the New Zealand ELISA which has been so successful in reducing the prevalence of infected farmed deer herds there from over three hundred to just two. Professor Frank Griffin who has been working on mycobacterial disease in farmed deer in New Zealand and many other countries generously attended the meeting and from this has developed the proposal to set up his ELISA with SRUC in Aberdeen. It is hoped that this might permit the revival of the Deer Health Scheme which would go some way to providing breeding stock with a degree of assurance of health status.

I seem to be blowing the trumpet for Scotland a little too loud but this goes along with the conference this year in the Scottish Borders at Moffat. Our principal host there is Joe Mallinson whose deer farm has been established for less than two years and we are very grateful to him for sharing with us the story of his new

enterprise. We will also be visiting Mauldslie deer farm just south of Edinburgh. This farm is proposing to run 1000 breeding hinds eventually and although it is in its very early stages we think members will be interested to hear from the owner, John Goffin.

There has also been significant activity in England this year, of course. The Quality Assurance Scheme for Deer Parks is now published in its first stage and Dan DeBaerdemaecker has written about this in the Handbook. Barrie Poole with Tom Marshall and others organised a great meeting at Cornbury Park to launch the scheme. Julian Stoyel has arranged open days at Houghton Hall and has been working with BASC to improve venison butchery and cooking skills. We would very much like BDFPA to take a bigger role in training possibly in conjunction with other larger bodies.

Most of the above can be read about in more detail in the Handbook. We have to express our sincere gratitude to Claire Parkinson who has been energetic in whipping up articles for this publication and to all those who have contributed whether as articles or in placing advertisements. I hope that you find it interesting and useful and we would as always welcome comments from you the readers.



ANOTHER YEAR HAS SLIPPED BY WITHOUT US NOTICING! THAT IS HOW IT SOMETIMES SEEMS, BUT IN REALITY IS FAR FROM THE CASE.

Just this week the press have been alive with boundless stories of venison sales increasing by 400% over the last 12 months, according to Kantar. Although we have seen good growth, I am sceptical about their figures having asked a few questions to them directly, but there is no doubt venison sales have increased by 100%, and for some products even more than that at seasonal peaks.



However you see it, it's encouraging to be part of such a growing industry where we are wanting lots more UK Farm and Park Deer, to meet this demand for locally sourced product.

The market place is changing all the time, with the last 12 months won by the rise of the discounters. This is impacting on more of the trade than we realise, and already ALDI are only 0.1% smaller than Waitrose nationally and who are now reporting a reduced sales growth of 0.64% over the last period, considerably less than previous, and more in line with some of the other retailers other than those who have declared % drops below the line. The message here is that venison has to be realistic to the eventual end market, and although these are exciting times it is not venison at any price. It has to be competitive and in line with the other proteins, or it will fall away as quickly as it has risen, back to a small niche business again.

Deer farming has had a lot of support in Scotland, and it is good to see such interest coming from there. We will be holding our Annual Conference in Scotland this year in the Moffat area, the details of which will be released in the usual way, and possibly before you read this!

The Park QA Scheme launch has been delayed for several reasons, which personally I have found frustrating, but I hope we will end up with a good scheme, which initially will go out in 2 stages. Further details of this are within, and we hope the Annual Conference will be the launch pad for this finally.

I hope you have been able to attend some of our Open Days and events this year. Woburn and Denham did us proud at the conference, and it was great to show some of our European friends how it should be done

I hope this year we will see the BDFPA working more closely with other countryside organisations where we are jointly promoting Deer Farming and Deer Parks as an enterprise on a modern efficient estate.

Finally I would like to thank everyone for all the time they give us, especially the Council and Claire, and to reiterate that we are always looking for new members and interested parties to join us.

LATEST VENISON MARKET FIGURES DEMONSTRATE CONTINUED HEALTHY GROWTH IN SECTOR

HEADLINES THAT SALES OF VENISON IN THE UK HAVE INCREASED BY ALMOST £5 MILLION RISING FROM £1.2 MILLION IN JUNE 2013 TO £6.4 MILLION IN JUNE 2014, A RISE OF 413 PER CENT ACCORDING TO KANTAR WORLDPANEL, ARE ENCOURAGING BUT CONFUSING. THEY DO HOWEVER DEMONSTRATE UNEQUIVOCALLY THAT VENISON IN THE UK CONTINUES TO INCREASE DRAMATICALLY IN POPULARITY, THAT DEMAND IS GROWING YEAR ON YEAR, AND THAT A REAL OPPORTUNITY EXISTS FOR DIVERSIFICATION INTO DEER FARMING WHETHER FOR THE PRODUCTION OR FINISHING OF STOCK, OR THE PRODUCTION OF VENISON.

The Kantar figures represent retail value. In real terms therefore the UK market overall is bigger still in value terms, with catering, restaurant and food service, local specialist butchers and direct sales through mail order to be added.

The Scottish Venison Partnership (SVP) estimates the market on values to the game dealer/processor as the majority of venison sourced in Scotland comes from the wild red deer cull. Total Scottish production is now estimated at between 2500 and 3000 tonnes per annum, with a further 1000 tonnes imported or produced elsewhere in the UK for the UK market. At a value of £2.25 per kilo, this equates to a total UK market value of between £8 million and £9 million. Production of farmed venison from Scotland represents just a small proportion of this figure – currently around 50 tonnes or a value of around £250,000.

The estimated market growth overall as forecast by SVP is somewhat more modest. 25 per cent has been quoted as an achievable figure, but SVP is working on the basis of around 10 per cent growth in the market per annum. The volume of venison coming from the wild red deer cull is static – therefore the only method to supplement domestic production is through increased volumes from deer parks and deer farms. SVP has set a target, endorsed by Scotland Food and Drink and the Scottish Government to increase production by 1000 additional tonnes per annum by 2020, reflecting an increase of just 5 per cent per annum. Forecasts show that this, although highly ambitious and requiring possibly 300 new deer farms to start up in the course of the next 6 years, will still mean there will be more venison entering the UK from New Zealand, Ireland, Poland and Spain, and from elsewhere in the UK

than Scotland will be able to produce on its own. Market growth would not be possible without imports, and figures released by New Zealand show that 29,000 deer carcasse equivalents were imported from New Zealand in 2013.

The Deer Farm Demonstration Project whose partners Scotland Food and Drink, SFQC Ltd, the Scottish Venison Partnership, NFU Scotland and Culquoich Estate (the selected deer demonstration farm in Strathdon) is designed to encourage more farmers to consider the potential for deer as a part of their farming enterprise. Four demonstration days have been held at Culquoich so far covering a range of aspects including stock, farm layout, agronomy and pasture, finance, business planning and tax, deer health, market opportunities.

The demonstration project has received £95,000 in SRDP funding through the Scottish Government Skills Development Scheme over two years, an indication of how seriously the Scottish Government views the potential of deer farming and venison as a major opportunity.

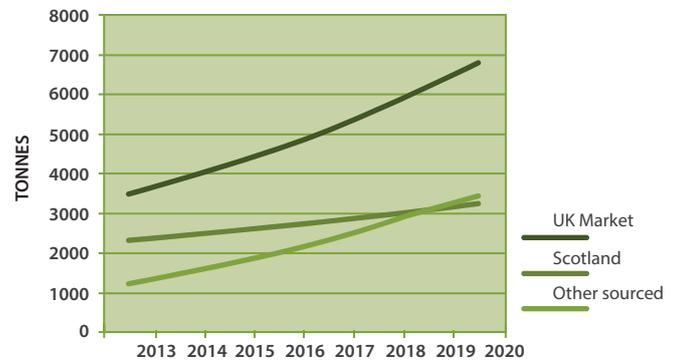
For those interested in diversifying into deer farming these are some of the main issues to consider.

How much land is required? In Scotland, and as a yardstick, hinds can be stocked at 10/ha on good quality grassland, c 8 hinds/ha on improved upland, and between 0.5 and 4 hinds/ha on marginal ground depending on the quality of the grazing. Marginal ground is more expensive to fence and production from it is less. Available land will determine layout, stocking levels, and fencing costs.

Fencing averages between £6 and £10 per metre depending on factors including whether good stock fencing is already in situ and can be utilised



SCOTTISH VENISON PRODUCTION V OTHER SOURCED (IMPORTED AND REST OF UK) TO MEET 10 PER CENT UK MARKET GROWTH 2013-2020



* Scotland produced venison (growth of 5 per cent per annum overtaken by other UK and imports by 2020.

in the layout of the deer enterprise through 'topping up', whether shelter belts require to be included or excluded, the type of terrain etc. For a unit of significant size, housing, yards and handling facilities will be required. In addition, the price of stock should be considered.

A major unknown is what grant funding will be available to help. Deer will qualify in Scotland under the new area based entitlement, and for new entrants. In addition it is hoped that aspects of the new SRDP will help but what exactly is as yet uncertain.

There will also be annual outlays for feed (although this can be reduced where good quality silage is available), veterinary, transport, and labour which, compared to other livestock enterprises, is minimal.

For those wishing to know more, the next Deer Farm Demonstration Day will take place at Culquoich, Glenkindie on Tuesday 11 November 2014.

See the website:
www.deerfarmdemoproject.scottish-venison.info or
 contact the Venison Advisory Service Ltd on
 0131 445 5570, or email: mail@venisonadvisory.co.uk

Venison

Market



Deer Health

FERTILISING GRASSLAND FOR DEER HEALTH & PRODUCTIVITY

THE FIRST FACT TO CONSIDER IS THAT DEER ARE DEIGNED TO THRIVE ON GRASSLAND. THAT IS STATING THE OBVIOUS, BUT IN MY EXPERIENCE NOT ENOUGH QUESTIONS ARE ASKED AS TO THE QUALITY AND AVAILABILITY OF THE NUTRITION BEING SUPPLIED FROM THE GRASS. AS AN INDUSTRY, WE ARE TOO QUICK TO PROVIDE AN ADDITIONAL SOLUTION TO A PROBLEM FROM A CAN! NEEDLESS TO SAY, THERE ARE MANY ENVIRONMENTS WHERE AD-LIB NUTRIENTS TO ENSURE PROFITABILITY IS A SENSIBLE PRACTICE, BUT AS AN ADDITION TO WHAT THE GRASS SUPPLIES, NOT INSTEAD OF IT. NUTRITION FROM GRASS IS CHEAPER AND MORE EFFICIENTLY ABSORBED BY THE DEER.

WHERE TO START INVESTIGATING?

The first aspect to consider is the grass species that are prevalent in your sward [the upper layers of soil covered in grass], and assess when those species were drilled. Consider that perennial ryegrass has a productive life of up to five years. It will remain green for longer than five years but the nutrition that is supplied will be negligible. The same principle applies to all grass species.

When looking down at your grass, can you see soil? If so, your sward is not dense enough and you are wasting an opportunity to increase health and live-weight gain.

When was the sward last chain-harrowed or aerated? Depending on the soil type, this should be carried out at least twice a year and with passes at right angles to each other

A cost-effective remedial practice is to stitch-in appropriate species at roughly half rate (approximately 7 kg/ac or 17.5 kg/ha) every three years. This will ensure that at least half of the grass is providing all possible nutrition, and the rest is not too far behind. This action is best taken in the spring or autumn when the soil temperature is at least 6°C, and adequate moisture is available.

Wherever possible DON'T plough out the sward! This action destroys all the microbial interaction within the sward and the nutrients are volatilised [lost to the atmosphere]. It will take 2-3 years to re-establish that activity, and therefore

the profitability of the sward will be delayed. Consider that ryegrass only has a primary root depth of 60mm; hence that environment is easily destroyed.

Next action is to find out what the soil is capable of supplying to the grass.

Unfortunately the standard soil tests for pH (acidity), P – (phosphate), K –(potash), Mg – (magnesium) are nearly useless, as the results will only give an indication of what is available for the plants to utilise. Not whether the plants will actually be able to access the nutrients. Saying that, knowing the pH and Phosphate status in that test is essential.

Test results are generally provided with an indexed scale, where 0 indicates a low level of nutrient, and 3 or above indicates a high level in the soil. A high level of 3 or above may not necessarily be an advantage as this can often render other nutrients unavailable to the grass.

Grassland will grow productively at a relatively low [therefore acidic] pH of 6.0.

But phosphate, calcium and magnesium do start to become adsorbed into the soil colloid at this level, and therefore the grass will potentially have reduced access to these nutrients.

Phosphate is essential for root development, and therefore a low score [less than index 2] will seriously impede growth and productivity.

It is worth considering that when a root grows it produces an exudate [slimy layer on the surface



of the root acting as a lubricant] that is full of sugars and other attractive elements that the soil-borne microbes feed on. As a consequence the CEC [Cation Exchange Capacity] process can take place and ensure that the grass is fed adequately from the soil. More on this process later.

Organic Matter [OM] is the energy supply for your grassland, and ideally the OM content should be at least 5% to work effectively. Therefore soil analysis of this is essential, as microbes feed on the OM and convert it into plant available nutrition.

The definitive guide as to what is happening in the soil is the Cation Exchange Capacity [CEC]. This is a measure of the soils ability to release the essential cations [positively charged nutrients] from the soil for productive plant growth. The analysis does require interpretation to help the soil provide what the grass requires, but it is a useful investment in the future viability of the sward.

FERTILISER CHOICE, AND TIMING OF APPLICATION

Grass growth happens once the soil temperature is 6°C, and it is then that it needs feeding. Depending on the soil type, and prevailing weather patterns, this will usually be in early spring: March or early April in most years. Don't neglect the opportunity to feed the grass in the autumn to ensure productive and nutritious growth in the spring of the following year.

NITROGEN (N)

If we consider that the majority of grass species only have a root depth of 60 mm, then spreading AN 34.5% [Ammonium Nitrate] onto grass is not cost-effective. From the schematic further in this article it can be seen just how fast the Nitrate element of 34.5% AN moves through the soil profile. In the majority of cases the nutrient moves so fast through the soil that the roots can't absorb it. Or even worse, they do absorb it and help to generate too high a sugar content in the grass for the deer to utilise resulting in scouring and loss of condition.

Urea [46% ammonium] slowly releases nitrogen to the crop at a rate that it can utilise efficiently without over promoting lush growth. In a normal season the price of urea is cheaper per kg of nitrogen than AN.

Many farmers and growers have been put off using urea as they have been told that it is prone to volatilisation [lost to the atmosphere]. This is true, but only if moisture isn't available to dissolve

the fertiliser. It is highly unlikely that there won't be enough moisture held in the grass to dissolve the nutrients. Needless to say if the sward has an open habit, and it hasn't rained for a long time, then application is illogical.

PHOSPHATE (P)

As I have already said, this is the essential nutrient for root growth. Without access to this nutrient the grassland will not thrive, resulting in greater expense due to the use of ad lib feeding for the deer.

Fertiliser choice is largely dependant on availability and price. Please consider the schematic that is enclosed in this article.

POTASH (K)

Generally within agriculture the importance of this nutrient is significantly underestimated.

Potash drives the transpiration process. This is that movement of dissolved nutrients in water up through the plant from the roots to sites of utilisation. From this definition it can be seen that access to available potash is essential to maintain a healthy sward that delivers health and liveweight gain.

Without free access to potash, all crops will develop hidden hunger. This is when the crop appears healthy and viable (Usually through ready access to nitrogen) but in reality is lacking in nutritional content. All crops will suffer a yield penalty as a result of this.

Excessive potash availability to the grass, and therefore the deer, means that the extracellular fluid (fluid not contained in cells) is permanently high in potassium. This particularly relates to the spinal cord, brain and muscles. The high potassium levels upsets the delicate sodium: potassium ratio and as a consequence the nerves and muscles cannot relax creating restless hyperactive Deer.

Personally I always recommend utilising Patentkali for all potash applications. The reason being that it is a natural product that contains magnesium and sulphur, all of which are essential for productive grass growth.

Patentkali contains 30% K, 10% Mg and 42% SO₃

I appreciate that MoP [Muriate of Potash] is the cheapest product on the market for delivering potash, but don't use it! The high salt content in the MoP breaks down in the soil creating a powerful sterilant that kills all the essential soil-borne microbes and significantly retards both

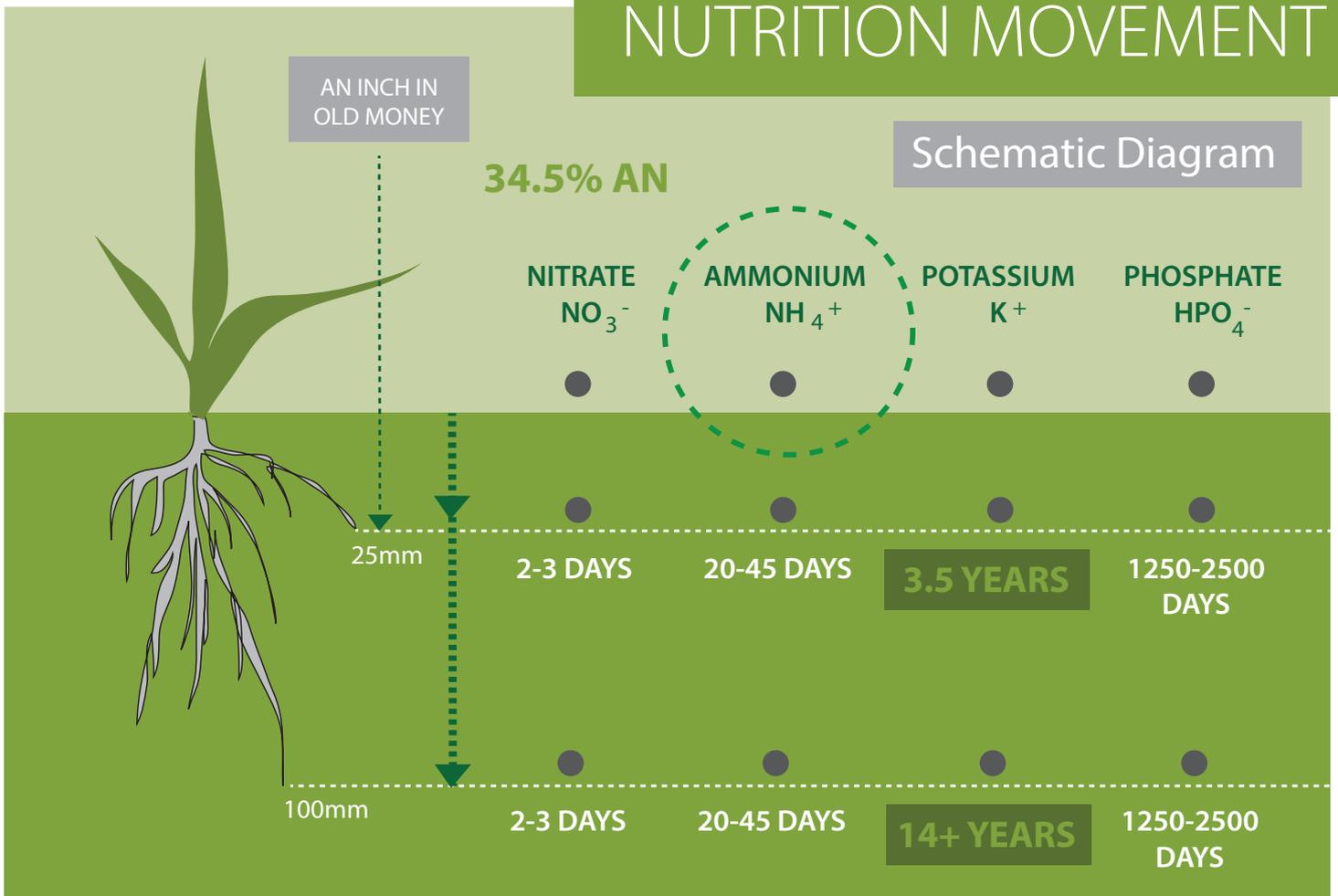


crop growth and nutritional content. The sterilant that is produced [hyperchloric acid] is used as an anti-bacterial agent in hospitals, which hopefully highlights just how effective it is at killing good and bad microbes alike.

A better alternative to MoP would be SoP [Sulphate of Potash] as the extra sulphur it contains is vital for grass productivity and growth.

For help and advice please call Jonathan Holmes on +44(0) 7976 894842 or contact me via e-mail jholmeslpa@btinternet.com

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T: **07774584638** E: julianstoyel@gmail.com

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Progress report

OUR FIFTH YEAR AS AN ORGANIC DEER FARM

WHY DID WE BECOME ORGANIC? – THE FACT THAT RIVERFORD WERE LOOKING FOR ORGANIC VENISON WAS A MAJOR INFLUENCE FOR US TO TURN OUR DEER UNIT INTO AN ORGANIC OPERATION.

Tony Bennett

I have always felt that this type of farming was really how I wished to farm. Basically it comes down to a more beneficial environmental option which I feel more comfortable with, rather than taking the easiest option and applying chemical fertilisers.

My main goal was being able to hold a similar stocking level – I knew this would be a challenge.....which it was! Our pastures were reliant on fertilising and we had to find a way of maintaining our grass yields. Adjusting to this was not easy and even with plenty of cattle and deer manure, our pastures were thin. The silage crops were also poor. To counteract this, we did full soil analysis of the farm. We could then study our pH, phosphate and potash levels. If pH levels were low, we applied lime to bring it up to 6.3pH. To increase the P&K levels, we had to find a good source of organic chicken manure which we finally found. At first it was £25/tonne, but with the volumes we require, we are now supplied at £17/tonne delivered in.

The composition per tonne is:
Nitrogen 30 units, Phosphate 25

units, Potash 18 units.

This works out cheaper than artificial fertiliser but there is the extra cost of spreading with a manure spreader which takes more time and horse power. However, you also have the benefit of all of the extra organic matter that is put on the land. This is the most important factor and after several years of applying chicken manure in the spring, our fertility levels have dramatically increased. This year we are finding that some fields do not need any additional dung and the levels of spring grass are excellent. Achieving this level of fertility is a lot of extra work, but now we have a high clover to grass ratio which is giving us very good growth rates for the deer. The muck must be applied when the grass is growing well. Environmentally we have a more diverse range of plants. Where the land is wet we have fenced it off to let traditional plants regenerate. The steepest land is also fenced off which is now full of flowers and a range of butterflies. Some of our small woods have also been fenced to keep the deer out so that there is now regeneration of the young trees. These areas actually were very low producing so it has been well worthwhile and satisfying to make some accommodation for the wild flora and fauna.



This year we are converting one of our conventional fields to organic status. The field was in arable but we have just justified sowing a 3 year ley on red and white clover with Italian rye grass (IRG). Before the field was ploughed we applied 2.5 tonnes of chicken manure per acre. The field must be ploughed straight away otherwise 50% of the nitrogen will be lost as ammonia. This forage will be cut for our very best silage to be fed in the drier summer months to the yearlings and calves in the winter. Making silage off the deer farm takes the stock pressure off the farm and it means we will be able to fatten more animals. Unfortunately our other land does not border the deer farm so we shall not be erecting a deer fence around this field.

I have been farming deer for 30 years as well as cattle and arable. The deer unit is the backbone of our farm operation which gives me the best profit and satisfaction.

If anyone would like advice on deer management please contact:

**Tony Bennett, Chilton Deer Farm, Cadeleigh, Tiverton, Devon EX16 8RT
chiltondeer@btinternet.com**



TB *in Deer*

TB IN DEER AND THE PROPOSED DEER HEALTH SCHEME

WHEN DISCUSSING GROWTH OF THE DEER FARMING SECTOR WE HAVE TO REMEMBER THAT TUBERCULOSIS (TB) HAS THE POTENTIAL TO HAVE CATASTROPHIC EFFECTS ON NOT JUST INDIVIDUAL HERDS BUT ON THE INDUSTRY AS A WHOLE.



Bovine tuberculosis (known as TB) is caused by the bacterium *Mycobacterium bovis* (*M. bovis*) and is an infectious disease in deer, cattle, badgers and many other mammals. As widely publicised TB is one of the biggest challenges facing the cattle farming industry today, particularly in the west and south west of England. Unlike cattle there is at present no routine statutory TB testing programme for deer herds in GB. However, AHVLA may require the testing of deer, at the owner's expense, in order to check for the presence of TB. Bovine TB in deer is a notifiable disease in farmed, park or wild deer. Under the Tuberculosis (Deer) Order 1989 (as amended), suspicion of TB in any deer (or deer carcass), must be notified to the local AHVLA Office. Should a deer herd become infected with TB the consequences, in terms of movement restrictions, can be disastrous.

Therefore as we seek to develop the deer farming sector we need to be aware of the risks of deer movements from areas with a high level of TB. Scotland currently has a 'TB free' status, however this could rapidly change if TB is 'bought in'.

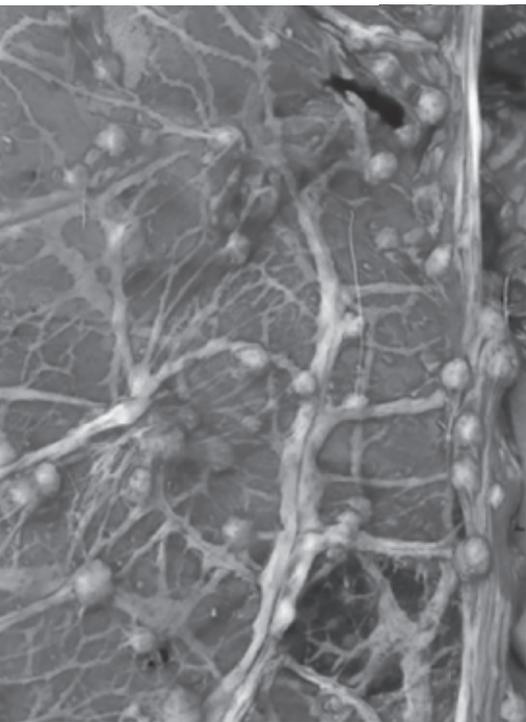
Turning back the clock, deer farming in the UK was developing steadily until about 1985 when tuberculosis was diagnosed in several herds; there seemed to be little technology for diagnosing TB in deer and there were no regulations in place to allow deer farmers to recover. In response to these TB outbreaks a farmer-funded Deer Health Scheme was established in 1989 and has existed for many years. However the Health Scheme was not accepted by the industry as the skin test utilised proved to be inadequate, with many false positives. Understandably concern arose over subsequent movement restrictions, deer farmers lost confidence in the Scheme and so the existing Scheme has had no members for several years.

This uncertainty and nervousness caused the market for hinds to collapse and set back deer farming for 20 years. Many of us are concerned that the industry could experience similar setbacks again and concerns have been raised that new deer herds have little security in purchasing breeding stock.

In order to address these concerns we would like to revive the Deer Health Scheme using an alternative testing procedure, one already established and proven in New Zealand (NZ). The object of this would be to create a pool of accredited herds from which people could buy deer with reasonable confidence that they were not infected with TB.

To facilitate this work staff within SAC (Scottish Agricultural College) Consulting Veterinary Services are working closely with Dr John Fletcher on behalf of BDFPA. We are also working with DEFRA, the Scottish government, the Veterinary Deer Society and supermarkets in order to re-establish the Deer Health Scheme. The Scheme would be industry-driven and voluntary.

The basis of New Zealand's testing procedure involves a skin test initially, carried out using only bovine



tuberculin. Each animal which shows any visible, measurable or detectable reaction to that injection is then blood sampled 10-30 days later and the bloods are subjected to an ELISA blood test. This testing protocol has been used as part of NZ's TB control programme, reducing the number of infected deer herds in NZ from 250 to just two. The success of NZ's blood test has been recognised internationally by The World Health Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) as a valid test for TB diagnosis in deer.

Professor Frank Griffin is the chief scientist involved in the development and utilisation of the blood test and so we have been working closely with Prof. Frank Griffin and his laboratory team in New Zealand. In order to adopt this blood test from NZ Fiona Murray and myself, from SAC Consulting, Inverness, went to New Zealand in September. Provided there are no legislative barriers, and we are able to establish the blood test here in the UK, the Deer Health Scheme will be revived.

The viability of the Deer Health Scheme will require close liaison with the BDFPA during the next months. There are still various aspects of the

Scheme to discuss e.g. frequency of testing and the age of animals to be tested. We would like the BDFPA to take on board the challenges of using the Scheme to create a nucleus of attested deer farms to provide breeding stock for new entrants to deer farming. This will also demand assistance from governments to provide an administrative framework. It is anticipated that industry and academic members will meet regularly as an advisory panel to the Deer Health Scheme and that they will have meetings with government to refine the Deer Health Scheme so as to encourage farmers to join.

In summary, the Deer Health Scheme for farmed deer will be voluntary and industry-driven. The costs of the tests have not yet been calculated but it is likely that the farmer would have to pay for all tests. We do not want to impose compulsory testing but instead we want to provide a viable testing regime which in turn will benefit the venison industry.

For further information/to discuss please contact Fiona Bannerman Tel 01483 243030 fiona.bannerman@sac.co.uk

Venison
&
The Venison
Market



AS I WRITE THIS WE HAVE BEEN TOLD THROUGHOUT THE PRESS OF AN AMAZING SURGE IN DEMAND FOR VENISON IN BRITAIN. APPARENTLY THE GROCER HAS REPORTED DATA FROM MARKET ANALYSTS, KANTAR WORLDPANEL, WHO FOUND THAT SALES OF THE GAME MEAT HAD ROCKETED MORE THAN FOURFOLD, 413%, YEAR ON YEAR, FROM £1.2 MILLION IN JUNE 2013 TO £6.4 MILLION LAST MONTH. THIS IS HUGELY GRATIFYING FOR THOSE OF US WHO HAVE BEEN SHOUTING OUT FROM THE ROOFTOPS WHAT A DELICIOUS AND HEALTHY MEAT IT IS.

Interestingly this seems to be largely a British feature. The main markets for New Zealand which, of course, exports by far and away the most venison of any country, remain Germany and to a lesser extent other European markets such as Austria, Switzerland and Belgium and the Netherlands and France. These markets are long established and traditional depending on wild meat until New Zealand came along. I believe that they are more dependent on the catering trade and that the consumers are probably older than in Britain and therefore declining. They are, I think, not being replaced by younger consumers who think of venison as the preserve of an older generation often with hunting connections. In Britain on the other hand, our strategy from the beginning had always been to target and promote farmed venison to a new range of consumers who regarded it as a new product and who therefore approached it with no preconceptions.

It is especially appropriate then to consider what we know of venison and British tastes for it. It is just five years since the completion of a large research project on venison undertaken by ADAS based at Rosemaund, Hertfordshire and the University of Bristol. This was a broad based study funded by a LINK funding package in which industry provided resources in time through the co-operation of various deer abattoirs and deer farmers and matched government funding allowed ADAS to carry out their research. The moving spirit behind this ambitious project was Jane Emerson and she was supported by other members of BDFPA Council on the one hand and Mervyn Davies, Dennis Chapple and colleagues at ADAS with Alan Fisher and Geoff Nute at Bristol.

*Venison has approximately
one third the fat of beef
and is lower in calories.*

Project Title:

IMPROVED VENISON QUALITY FOR SUSTAINABLE DEER FARMING

The objectives of the project were to: 1) identify suitable parameters for assessing venison quality; 2) investigate consumer perceptions; and 3) assess the effects of packaging and slaughter conditions on quality. In a venison quality sampling study, muscle pH was consistent across sexes and age groups, but proved not to be a sensitive indicator of quality. Venison loin muscle colour deteriorated at a slightly faster rate than beef, and was lower after a 7-day display period, indicating it is a browner meat and less stable than beef. Muscle shear force values demonstrated wide variation, and 0.17 and 0.13 proportions were classified as 'very tender' and 'very tough' respectively; a phenomenon that requires further investigation. Venison muscle was very low in total fatty acids; only 0.33 and 0.25 of that found in beef sirloin steaks and lamb chops. In addition, favourable fatty acid ratios for polyunsaturates to saturates (P:S) and omega-6 to omega-3 were demonstrated. Results from two omnibus consumer surveys indicated venison is eaten by 7-8% of the population. The main barriers to venison consumption are a lack of knowledge or awareness, rather than a particular dislike of venison. From venison buyer and tasting surveys conducted in farm shops, farmers' markets and multiple retailers, taste and tenderness were rated the most important factors influencing the purchasing decision. Venison was adjudged to compare well with other meats, and scored most strongly for its 'healthy/low fat' and 'taste' characteristics. After tasting venison, 'tenderness', 'juiciness' and 'overall liking' were scored highly, and 91% of respondents indicated that they would purchase venison in the future. A packaging evaluation study confirmed the superiority of vacuum packing for venison. Grass-fed deer produced venison that was higher in omega-3 fatty acids, and was more tender and juicy than venison from concentrate-fed deer. However, although dietary vitamin E supplementation reduced the rate of decline in colour saturation of venison, it was not as successful at extending shelf life as it is in beef. In three slaughter experiments on: slaughter methods, dressing intervals and evisceration procedures, there was no significant effects on shelf life, as assessed from changes in colour saturation over 5 days of retail display, or in hygienic quality from microbiological counts for TVC and Enterobacteriaceae.

A SUMMARY OF THE RESULTS:

Very low fatty acid contents and favourable ratios of important fatty acids were confirmed in venison.

Venison muscle shear force value, if easily measured, and colour saturation changes, could provide valuable differentiation in quality between carcasses.

This project has confirmed 'best practice' for venison packaging systems.

An assurance that, provided deer are handled competently, slaughter methods should have little effect on venison quality.

The GB farmed deer industry and venison supply chain have been provided with key messages to improve knowledge and bring benefit to the production, processing and retailing of venison.

Consumer surveys provided valuable information to support future promotional and marketing activities, and better understanding of consumer attitudes, can help target these to best effect.



KEY MESSAGES FOR INDUSTRY

Venison Sampling Study

OBJECTIVE 1

The majority of deer (92%) exhibited calm behaviour immediately before slaughter.

Muscle pH was consistent across sexes and age groups, but proved not to be a sensitive indicator of quality.

Loin muscle colour deteriorated at slightly faster rate than beef and saturation values were lower after a 7-day display period, indicating it is a browner meat and somewhat less stable than beef.

There was large variation between carcasses in muscle shear force values and this phenomenon requires further investigation.

Venison muscle is very low in total fatty acids (1.2%); only 33% and 25% of that found in beef sirloin steaks and lamb chops respectively. In addition, favourable ratios for polyunsaturated to saturated fats (P:S ratio) of 0.6 - 0.8, and omega-6 to omega-3 fatty acids of 1.5 - 2.7, were demonstrated.

Bacteria levels on carcasses were acceptably low for both abattoir and field-shot deer, demonstrating that dressing techniques are effective.

Consumer Surveys

OBJECTIVE 2

The two omnibus consumer surveys (in 2006 and 2008) indicated venison is eaten by 7-8% of the population, and consumption is higher for people in social class AB than those in class DE.

The main reasons for people not eating venison were "don't know where to buy venison" (20%) and "don't know enough about it" (18%), rather than a particular dislike of venison.

In the venison buyer and tasting surveys conducted in farm shops, farmers' markets and multiple retailers, quality, taste and tenderness were rated the three most important factors influencing the purchasing decision.

Venison was adjudged to compare well with other meats, and scored most strongly for its 'healthy/low fat' and 'taste' characteristics.

After tasting venison, 'tenderness', 'juiciness' and 'overall liking' were scored highly, and 91% of respondents indicated that they would purchase venison in the future, including 79% of previous non-eaters.

These surveys demonstrated clearly the large potential to increase venison consumption amongst current non-eaters.

Packaging Systems

OBJECTIVE 3

In an evaluation of five packaging systems, the superiority of vacuum packing for retail cuts of venison was clearly confirmed.

Modified atmosphere packing using O₂:CO₂ (80:20) offers only about two days longer shelf life than simple overwrapping.

Vacuum-packed loin muscle has a stable colour until 28 days after packaging, and steaks do not become rancid even after 35 days. In the redder topside muscle, there was some colour deterioration from day 17 after packaging.

In a feeding experiment, grass-fed deer produced venison that was higher in omega-3 fatty acids, and was more tender and juicy than venison from concentrate-fed deer.

Naturally-occurring levels of vitamin E in venison muscle were significantly higher for grass-fed animals, but the muscle was more susceptible to oxidation than venison from concentrate-fed deer. Overall, there was no difference in colour deterioration between venison produced from the two diets.

Dietary vitamin E supplementation reduced the rate of decline in colour saturation of venison, but was not as successful at extending shelf life as it is in beef; it prolonged shelf life by only 2-3 days in modified atmosphere packs.

Slaughter Systems

OBJECTIVE 4

Provided deer are handled competently at and around slaughter, then slaughter method should have little effect on venison quality.

Muscle colour became increasingly dark as the interval between bleeding to dressing increased, but hygienic quality was not affected.

Shelf life was inferior for venison from deer where the dressing interval was more than 80 minutes, so every effort should be made to complete dressing within this period after slaughter.

Whether evisceration occurs before or after skinning had no significant effect on any of the venison quality parameters assessed.

Wet weather conditions at slaughter can increase bacterial mobilisation from hides, but care and attention to detail at dressing can ensure hygienic carcasses.

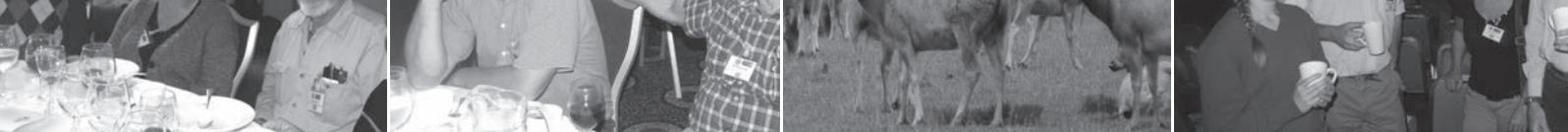




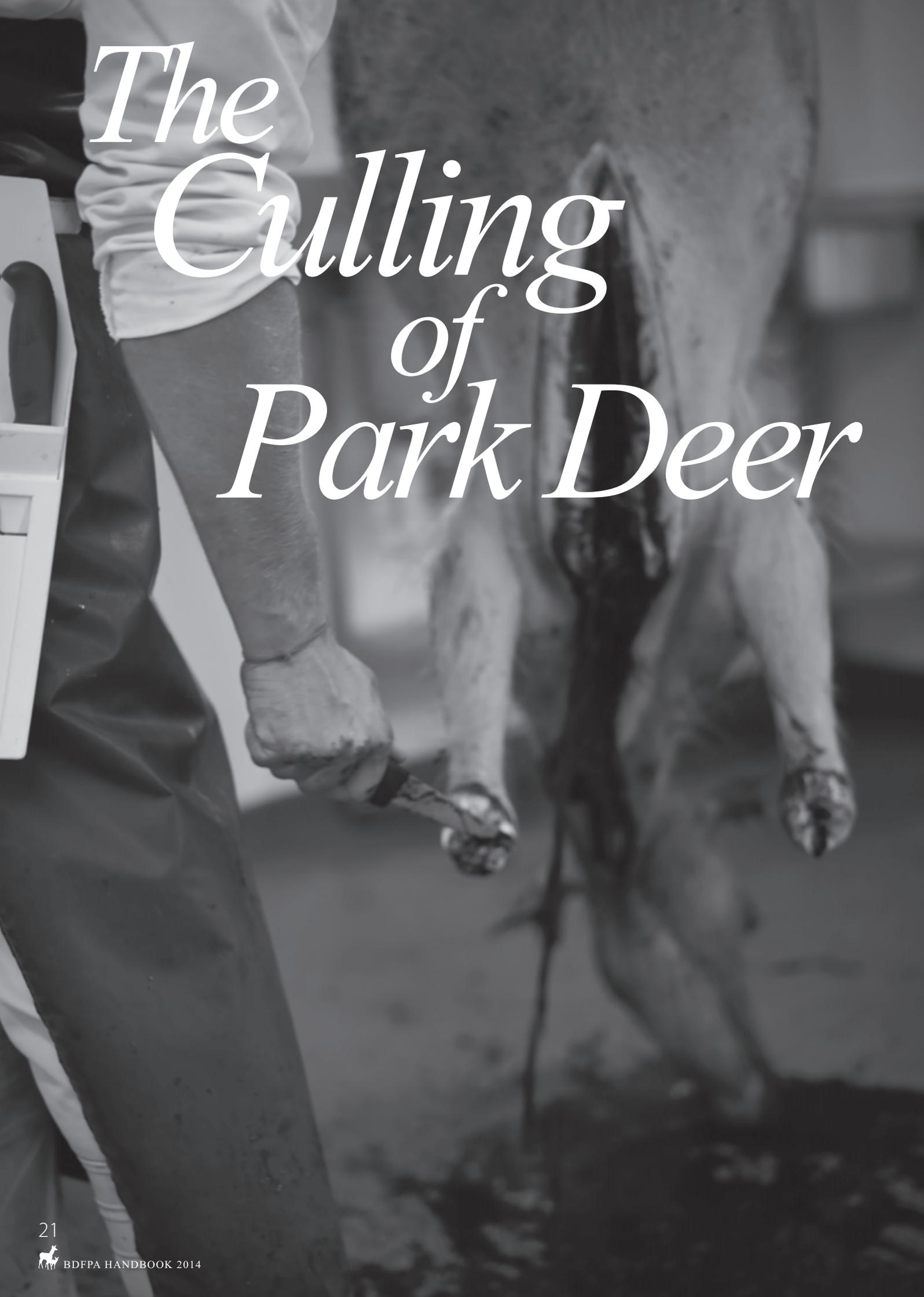
Conference Photos



2014 Bedfordshire, UK







The Culling of Park Deer

WITH THE NEW BDFPA PARK QUALITY ASSURANCE SCHEME NOW UP AND RUNNING, PARK CULLING AND THE WAY IN WHICH DEER ARE CULLED AND THEN HANDLED NEEDS TO BE TAKEN INTO CONSIDERATION.

With the increased demand for venison from across the world, park deer and park venison need to be taken seriously as a high quality product that could help to meet some of this demand. Culling is one of the standards that needs to be met to achieve Park Quality Assurance along with other requirements which are in place to help make sure you are within the law and to try and improve the standards and welfare of park deer.

Currently a large number of park carcasses are going directly to game dealers and not achieving their true worth. Cull planning and culling practices can have a large effect on the quality of the carcass that is produced. Remember that as soon as the animal is culled it becomes food product and the way in which the animal is handled after the shot and throughout the larding process can all have an influence on quality.

Generally speaking parks will cull 30% of their herd population a year. Planned cull numbers are of course park specific and change year on year depending on the goals of the park, stocking densities that are the objective, and the number of young born the previous year. Herd dynamics are key to a healthy population. Culls are often made up of 75% yearling animals for prime venison and 25% senior animals.

The Park Quality scheme states that a written cull plan has to be available to be viewed. Culling in parks normally takes place over the winter months and must take place within the requirements of the Deer Act

1991. All culls should be carried out or supervised by a suitably qualified person. Example of a suitable qualification is a DMQ DSC Level 1, LANTRA Level 2 in Wild Game Meat Hygiene or an HNC in Gamekeeping and Wildlife Management or equivalent. The person carrying out the cull must have a valid firearms certificate and use a firearm of a legal calibre and use legal ammunition suitable for deer. When selecting a legal deer calibre consideration needs to be taken in to account of the terrain of the park, species to be culled and the distance from which the deer are to be culled.. Head shooting is quickly being recognised as the preferred method for park culling producing a cleaner carcass but people must understand and be honest as to their own abilities when it comes to taking a shot.

Deer in parks are shot in various ways from stationary vehicles, high seats and on foot. Every park and individual will have their own preferred method; different species react differently to different methods. Ideally deer should not be shot at feeding times and while they are feeding. Deer should be allowed to eat freely without disturbance. Culling should not cause stress to the culled animal and other remaining animals: animal welfare and ensuring a clean humane kill is of the upmost importance and more important than worrying about income. It is recommended that the animal is bled as soon as possible to help improve the quality of the meat.

Gralloching must be carried out as soon as possible after culling, & certainly within 1 hour.

Gralloching must be carried out in a hygienic manner according to Best Practice principles. (Larder design and larder work come under a separate section within the park QA.) Ante- and post- mortem inspection must be carried out and findings recorded for all deer culled. Procedures should be in place for when a notifiable disease is suspected. Carcasses must be transported to the larder as soon as possible after culling. Vehicles used to move carcasses must be constructed to ensure carcasses are transported in hygienic condition. The stacking of carcasses is not allowed under the QA.

Under the park Quality Assurance gralloching in the field is not allowed, all animals must be taken back to a suitable larder facility. Larders must be designed, constructed and maintained to enable all carcasses to be stored in a clean hygienic condition, free from contamination. All surfaces (including surfaces of equipment) in contact with food must be maintained in a sound condition and be easy to clean and disinfect. This requires the use of smooth, washable and non toxic materials such as stainless steel, galvanised steel, aluminium, enamel and hardwood.. The larder must have adequate natural or artificial lighting. Lighting must be fitted with protective covers to avoid the risk of glass contamination. An adequate supply of water must be available. If the supply is not mains water a current water test certificate must be available for inspection. Wash basins with hot and cold (or mixed) water must be provided



Short times from culling to bleeding and from bleeding to gralloching are crucial for good quality venison as are hygienic, quality vehicles and premises.



Simple handling improvements and standards of hygiene can dramatically improve carcass quality.



and located in the larder. Taps must be arm, knee or foot operated. Materials for cleaning hands and hygienic drying (e.g. paper towels) must be provided. Larder work under the park QA relates to the storage of primary products ie. skin- on carcasses that have been gralloched.

EU and UK hygiene legislation places obligations on all food businesses (which larders fall under) to apply good hygiene practices and food safety management procedures. These should be based on hazard analysis and critical control point (HACCP) principles. Therefore all carcasses must be handled and stored in the larder in accordance with current food hygiene regulations. All deer larders should be registered with Local Authorities as Food Business premises and all deer larders should have a written hygiene hazard assessment plan. Deer larders should also have a current HACCP control plan in place. Larder premises must always be clean and hygienic before any fresh carcasses are taken into the larder.

A larder should have adequate facilities for the cleaning and disinfection of work tools and equipment. These facilities must be easy to keep clean. Where hot water sterilisation is used these facilities must be constructed of stainless steel. Where alternative means of sterilisation are used, including UV sterilisers, suitable alternatives to stainless steel may be used. Food safe chemical cleaning agents should be used when cleaning down and fibre ropes must not be used.

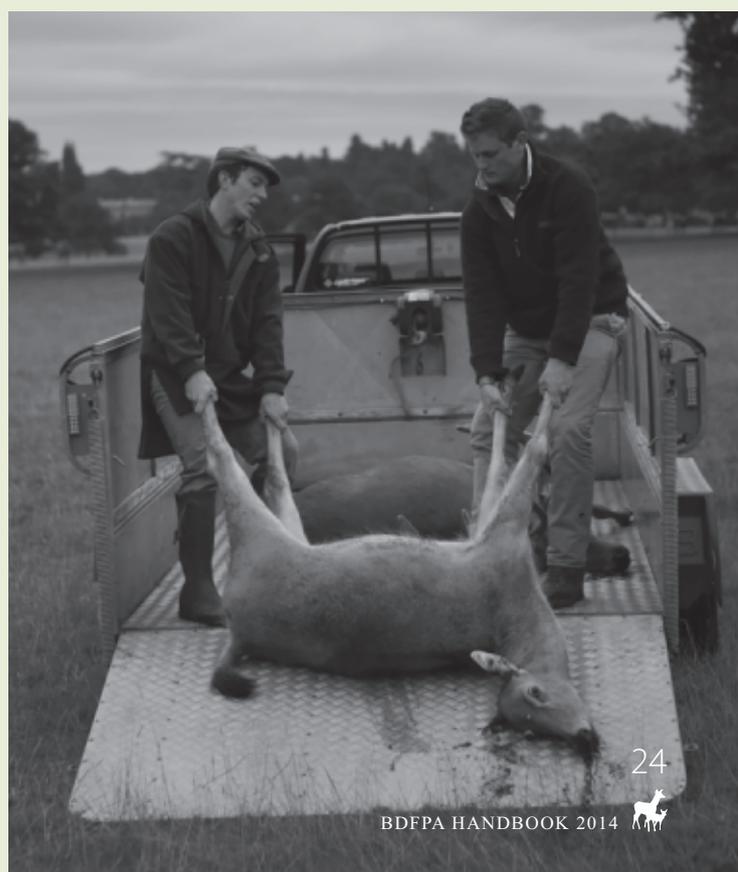
Every larder will have to have a documented plan detailing actions to be taken in the event of a notifiable disease being suspected. This should include contact details for the Divisional Veterinary Manager, Animal Health Inspector, Chief Environmental Health Officer. In the event that a notifiable disease is suspected advice must be sought as to whether the carcasses should be moved from the place of despatch. In all cases the carcass should be retained outside the larder, in secure storage with the head, pluck and gralloch away from other carcasses.

All carcasses should be weighed and the level of condition recorded and labelled using approved labels to ensure traceability and comply with current Food Hygiene Legislation. Carcasses hung in a larder or chiller unit should not touch one another to allow free circulation of air. A larder must not be used for the storage of other game at the same time as eviscerated deer, unless using a designated area to prevent cross contamination which can be clearly monitored. Larder records should be kept for all carcasses. Larder records should demonstrate

traceability by recording a dedicated label number, where the deer was shot, the date and time of cull and by whom the animal was culled. Active chilling should begin as soon as possible after killing. Where chillers are unavailable carcasses must not remain in the larder for more than 18 hours, and this period must not exceed 12 hours when the outside temperature is >7 degree centigrade.

The culling of park deer may be a management practice we have to carry out but in return it provides us with an incredible by-product which can at times be very under rated. Simple handling improvements and standards of hygiene can dramatically improve carcass quality.

Parks will cull 30% of their herd population a year.



MBE

Nichola Fletcher

NICHOLA FLETCHER RECEIVED HER MBE IN THE NEW YEAR'S HONOURS FOR SERVICES TO VENISON.

How proud Nickie and John must be that all her excellent work has been recognised. She has tirelessly promoted deer farming from the culinary angle, having now written several books from superb recipes, game cooking and butchery advice to the history of feasting in her very successful 'Charlemagne's Tablecloth'. Not only are her books informative, but beautifully illustrated, and well worth every penny.

For this we all owe her a huge debt of gratitude beyond her writings for helping promote an industry right from its inception over 40 years ago to today. The most common question that anybody in the processing side knows, is how do you cook it? and Nickie has done her level best to tell us. I hope she continues to explore more ways of working with venison, and that we will see her at shows and events over the many years to come.

Nichola Fletcher's latest book 'The Meat Cookbook' has just been published by Dorling Kindersley. A massive tome, it contains, amongst a wealth of other useful information, a very good illustrated section on home butchery.

Her next book 'The Venison Bible' will be published next summer by Birlinn and will be a tiny paperback, RRP £4.99, so ideal for selling at point-of-sale outlets. www.nicholafletcher.com



NICHOLA AND JOHN FLETCHER HAVE NOT RETIRED.

WE ARE BUSIER THAN EVER – NICHOLA HAS JUST FINISHED A MASSIVE BOOK FOR DORLING KINDERSLEY ON MEAT AND MEAT BUTCHERY AND JOHN IS WORKING WITH VENISON ADVISORY SERVICES LTD AND DOING A LITTLE LIGHT TRUCKING.

HOWEVER OUR PRIDE AND JOY IS THE DEVELOPMENT OF OUR OWN DEER HERD WITH HELP FROM JULIAN STOYEL. THIS IS BASED ON THE INSHEWAN BLOODLINE CREATED BY COLIN GIBB ABOUT FORTY YEARS AGO USING PREDOMINANTLY SCOTTISH GENETICS. WE HAVE YOUNG STAGS AVAILABLE NOW AND IN A YEAR OR TWO WE'LL BE ABLE TO SELL SOME HINDS.



FLETCHERS



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Old Favourites

Recipes wax and wane in popularity but some never seem to go out of favour. Here are two: one an old favourite of mine that is never quite the same each time I make it. The other has remained a stalwart for lots of people, and encouraged many newcomers to try venison.

OVEN-BAKED BRAISED STEAKS

This is not my preferred way of cooking venison steaks, I have to admit. For me, it's the contrast between caramelised outside and pink, juicy inside, any day. But over the years, so many dozens of people have told me they cook their steaks this way - and enjoy it - that I cannot ignore them. It is certainly pretty foolproof if you don't like them pink (and many don't). Also, it is a good way for the very unconfident cook to get started. Clearly everything hinges on the quality of the soup used. I'd be making my own creamy wild mushroom soup, but that would destroy the object of this exercise. Some people use a ready-made sauce instead of the soup.

SERVES 4

4 LARGE VENISON HAUNCH STEAKS
50G (2 OZ) BUTTER, CHOPPED INTO SMALL PIECES
1 TIN OF CREAM OF MUSHROOM (OR CELERY) SOUP
120ML (¼ PINT) MILK
½ TEASPOON PEPPER

Preheat the oven to 175°C/Gas 4. Put the venison steaks into an ovenproof dish. Dot the pieces of butter on top of them. Mix together the remaining ingredients and pour them over the steaks. Cover the dish with foil and bake in the oven for about an hour, or until tender. Taste, and only add salt if necessary - most ready-made soups will be salty enough. They will happily keep warm for another 30 minutes if necessary. Great with mashed potatoes. Even better if you mash some celeriac, parsnip, or turnip (swede) in with the potatoes.

SPICE-RUBBED VENISON with lime risotto

This is more or less one of the recipes in Ultimate Venison. I've become enamoured of star anise of late; it goes well with venison as long as you don't overdo it so I've slipped some of that into the mix. If you like a little chilli kick, then add ¼ - ½ teaspoon of hot paprika too.

I am serving this with a lime-flavoured risotto which sets off the spices nicely. As with any risotto, the vegetables can be changed according to what's in season – we have some splendid runner beans at the moment. However, if you find this too much of a culture clash, serve it with Asian noodles that are cooked in stock with a tablespoon of Thai fish sauce in it, and with plenty of fine fresh herbs (mint, coriander, etc) stirred into them.

SERVES 4-6

900G (2LB) VENISON LOIN OR ROLLED HAUNCH
3 CARDAMOM PODS
½ TEASPOON GREEN PEPPERCORNS
½ TEASPOON GRATED NUTMEG
1 TEASPOON CORIANDER SEEDS
2 WHOLE STAR ANISE, OR ½ TEASPOON POWDERED

LIME RISOTTO
2 UNWAXED LIMES
4 SHALLOTS, CHOPPED
4 TABLESPOONS OLIVE OR GRAPSEED OIL
350G (12OZ) RISOTTO RICE
200ML (1/3 PINT) DRY WHITE WINE
1 LITRE (1 ½ PINTS) VENISON, BEEF, OR CHICKEN STOCK
350G (12 OZ) ASPARAGUS SPEARS
100G (4OZ) BABY BROAD BEANS
100G (4OZ) PETIT POIS
80G (3OZ) FRESHLY GRATED PARMESAN
SMALL BUNCH FRESH CORIANDER, CHOPPED

Brown the venison all over in hot butter & oil, then remove from the pan and allow it to cool slightly.

Heat up a pan without any oil and toast the spices for 3-4 minutes till they release their perfume, but don't let them burn. Cool. Then grind them in a pestle & mortar and scatter them over a sheet of cling film. Then roll the joint in the spices so that it is covered evenly all over. Wrap it in the cling film and leave for 2 hours at room temperature.

The risotto will take 30-40 minutes to cook; the cooking time for the venison depends on its thickness. For medium rare, heat the oven to Gas 8 (230°C) and allow 3-4 minutes per cm thickness (7½ -10m per inch). Then allow it to rest for 3-4 minutes per cm thickness (7½ -10m per inch) to allow the juices to spread evenly. Ideally, use a meat thermometer and stop the high-temperature cooking when it reaches 50°C and then rest until it reads 60°C. For rare, it is 45 and 55°C respectively.

For the risotto, grate the lime zest, extract the juice, and reserve. Trim the asparagus and chop into 2cm lengths. Heat up the stock. Heat the oil in a large, deep frying pan, and gently fry the shallots until transparent. Add the rice and fry it gently for five minutes, then add the wine and the lime juice. Increase the heat a bit and add a quarter of the stock and the tougher ends of the asparagus. Once the stock has been absorbed, add another quarter and keep stirring.

When the third quarter of stock is added, put in the middle parts of the asparagus and grind some black pepper into the risotto. With the final quarter of stock, add the broad beans, the peas, asparagus tips and the lime zest. Add salt to taste. Finally, stir in the Parmesan to give a creamy finish, and scatter the chopped fresh coriander over it before serving with the sliced venison.

Park Quality Assurance Scheme Update

IT WAS IN 2012 THAT THE BDFPA STARTED THE BALL ROLLING WITH THE IDEA OF SETTING UP A PARK QUALITY ASSURANCE SCHEME TO MEET THE EXPECTATIONS OF THE EVER DEMANDING PUBLIC AND RETAILERS. THE DEMAND FOR VENISON IS HIGHER NOW THAN IT HAS BEEN FOR YEARS.

The UK retail market for venison is growing very rapidly with The Grocer recently quoting a remarkable £5 million increase in venison sales to the year ending June 2014 representing a 413% growth. In the UK, we are processing about 40,000 animals per year from farmed and park sources, of these most of the park deer are fallow and almost all the farmed are red deer. The Scottish red deer cull is around 55,000 with a similar number of roe deer whilst the English wild deer cull is numerically greater but from smaller species.

The farmed deer represent only about 5- 6000 animals across the UK and Ireland. Whilst this figure may be an underestimate and is certainly growing, it shows how dependent we are on park and imports, which is a worry if China decided to eat lots! At least 80% of the venison sold in the UK is imported. There is therefore a huge demand for venison in Britain and parks are the obvious source for high quality carcasses.

At the BDFPA conference in 2013 it was announced that BDFPA had written a park quality assurance scheme.

In reality that was merely a draft

and now a year later we are nearly there after a lot of hard work from the park subcommittee.

What started out with the goal of trying to secure a higher and more stable price for park venison has evolved to cover so much more than that. We quickly realised that one of the main concerns we all had was for the welfare of the deer in parks across the UK and that the welfare and the husbandry of the deer in our care was possibly the main reason behind what we were trying to achieve, with the premiums for our venison coming in second.

We felt that we had to write the scheme ourselves as much as we could so that we could say that it was truly written by deer keepers for deer keepers. We also hope this means that we have kept full control of the scheme rather than have something inflicted upon us which could be very onerous indeed. We have though joined up with SFQC who are an independent organisation. A member of their team, Jonathan Whitehead, has proved invaluable in helping to get the scheme going and we have confidence that SFQC can assist us in achieving a standard compatible with legislative requirements and also a standard which retailers

will trust and recognise. As an association we did not want the scheme to be retailer owned as we felt it needs to be open to the whole market, and owned by ourselves. Retailers seek to differentiate themselves to meet the requirements of their customers and this results in specific supplier requirements. We all see how retailers compete with each other, and if one owned the scheme it could be shunned by others and something else would have to be created. One of the concerns we came across was "there are too many QA schemes already" – this was a common remark. With conventional livestock, such as cattle & sheep QA standards generally guarantee a premium for stock sold through auction markets and also to abattoirs. Most retailers won't touch anything that is not QA. Crops and produce (fruit and veg) cannot be sold to the major buyers without QA. With the demand for venison increasing, the retailers will inevitably demand something for deer.

Within a few months we had put together a draft copy of a park quality assurance scheme, covering all the points of managing deer within a park from the husbandry of the

animals to the culling and carcass preparation aspects.

This is when we hit a bit of a hold up. For us to take the scheme forward and turn it into a working document that would meet all the legal requirements will cost the BDFPA nearly £6000. This might not seem a huge amount of money to spend setting up an industry standard but it is a lot of money for the association to spend from our limited funds. Our other concern was the unpredictable take up of a full park quality assurance scheme by our members given the need to charge for accreditation inspections at a cost of approximately £220 per year.

As a committee we had to come up with an alternative to make sure that spending nearly £6000 of the association's funds is the right thing to do.

We have therefore developed a two tier scheme, level 1 as a basic entry level, and level 2 which is full Quality Assurance.

We have now written the level 1 scheme which is a much simpler form of the full QA and doesn't involve annual site inspections to gain accreditation. Inspections will be carried out for the level 2 by SFQC.

Instead of inspection Level 1 is based on the park in question completing a self-assessment checklist and supplying additional information and evidence to demonstrate that they are meeting the standards detailed in the level 1.

Key areas of the standards include stockmanship, bio-security, feed & water, deer health & welfare and carcass handling & larder facilities. This is a lead into level 2 as the majority of points have been taken from the level 2, which we hope to start running once we have sufficient numbers on the level 1 scheme. One of the largest obstacles that we have tried to get over is larder use. Within the QA we have, of course, had to follow the legislation that relates to larders and processing deer. The QA standards will help you meet the minimum legislative requirements. As a business supplying venison into the food chain you are considered to

be a Food Business Operator (FBO) and should be aware of the legislative requirements Regulation (EC) 852/2004, Regulation (EC) 853/2004 and Regulation (EC) 178/2002. Meeting the requirements of the QA scheme and being an approved member will help you be aware and meet the current legislative requirements. An inspection from one of the regulatory authorities will not seem as daunting. The consequences of being found to be in breach of these regulations is very serious.. I am sure a deduction from your SFP or worse still prosecution would not go down well with your employers – and most others estates as well.

Should you wish to research the current legislative requirements the Wild Game Guide published by FSA is a good start and can be found by following this link: <http://multimedia.food.gov.uk/multimedia/pdfs/guidance/wild-game-guide.pdf>

(As an aside the new Wild Game Guide should not be taken too seriously with regard to its criteria for distinguishing parks from farms. We have received assurance from Food Standards Association that the clause implying that all parks which feed their deer may be considered farms is an error and will not be enforced!)

We hope that the introduction of the level 1 QA will be well received and we can roll out the level 2 (full QA) quickly. Once the level 2 is up and running there will be a live members list on the website where people will be able to see who has gained the various levels.

We believe that the benefits of joining the Park QA are going to make economic sense. Processors buying wild Scottish Venison are paying up to 30p/kg premium for the Scottish Quality Wild Venison assured venison. Processors in England are also quoted as saying that there will be premiums of £1/kg for park QA venison. I know through discussions with several major retailers that they are becoming very aware of UK venison and the lack of any creditable QA scheme for park deer. We hope



that we have managed to get this scheme up and running in time to meet this market.

The schemes and the requirements can appear daunting to begin with but the BDFPA subcommittee will be on hand to advise and assist with any issues. When you join the QA you will also receive templates which can be used for recording the necessary data and records needed as evidence. The requirements will also be reviewed every year so they are kept up to date and workable for its members. We hope that by developing the scheme with feedback from park managers we may go some way towards improving the husbandry of deer in parks and in bringing parks and their venison closer to the end retailer.



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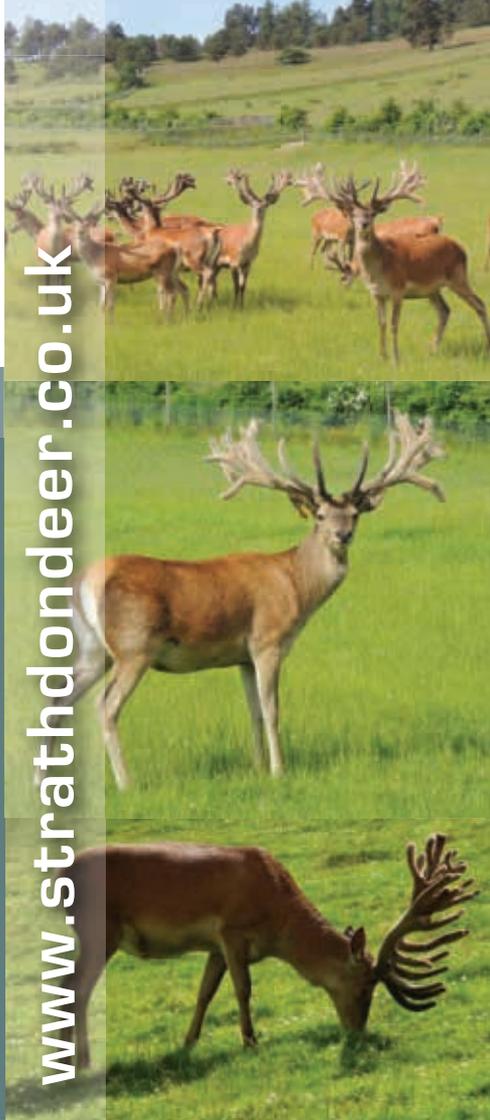
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The BDFPA on Facebook

We have a thriving Facebook group which is growing fast. This group is completely confidential and only current members of the BDFPA can join in or see who is a member. It is a perfect place for members to exchange ideas, get advice, buy and sell stock or services and network. We will also post details of events here for members to attend. If you would like to be part of the group and are a member of the Association, please contact Claire Parkinson – claire@bdfpa.org

We also have a public Facebook page, please 'Like Us' by clicking this if you haven't already. Here we will post any relevant news relating to venison or the deer industry that the public may be interested in.

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News from *FEDFA*

AS YOU ALL WILL KNOW THE BDFPA HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO HOST THE AUTUMN FEDERATION OF EUROPEAN DEER FARMERS' ASSOCIATION MEETING IN CONJUNCTION WITH ITS OWN AGM AND CONFERENCE AT BEDFORD LAST AUTUMN. THE MEETING WAS A SHORT MEETING DUE TO THE TIME RESTRAINTS BUT VERY WELL ATTENDED WITH DELEGATES FROM BELGIUM, NORWAY, SWEDEN, SWITZERLAND, SPAIN, CZECH REPUBLIC, FRANCE, GERMANY, LITHUANIA, LATVIA, NETHERLANDS AND POLAND.

Apart from joining the BDFPA members for the conference and farm visits, FEDFA members held their autumn management meeting. The first part of the meeting was the confirmation of the new Presidium of FEDFA. Morten Nystad from Norway replaced Radim Kotrba as President. I am sure that all the members of the BDFPA wish Morten all the best over the next two years and thank Radim for all his hard work over the last two years. Tomás Landete Castillejos of Spain was elected as 1st Vice President, Klaus Uwe Joerß of Germany 2nd Vice President, Asger Andersen of Denmark as Treasurer and Radim "Maugli" Kotrba as Secretary General.

John Fletcher also started a discussion on tuberculosis by asking for information from member states as to their current status with regard to tuberculosis in deer and what measures deer farmers were allowed to take in each country to eliminate TB.

The former president Radim Kotrba - Czech Republic stated that in the Czech Republic pre-movement testing of all deer was required and that a blood test developed in Brno was used. This testing was free due to support from the EU.

Klaus Uwe Joerss explained that in southern Germany TB had been recognised in cattle and wild deer probably as a result of contact with infected wild boar crossing from Austria. There was no requirement to test deer.

In Switzerland the situation was broadly similar in that cattle were thought to have been infected by wild deer during summer grazing in the mountains. No farmed deer had been found to be infected. There is a high population of badgers (dachs) and perhaps these were a factor. In southern Poland TB had been recognised in European bison, wild boar and deer. In Lithuania deer were skin tested before export and no disease had been reported. In Belgium skin tests were carried out before export but were perhaps not always read very carefully.

There was also discussion of the Schmallenberg virus as positive test results had been reported from deer in Lithuania being tested before export to Russia. Antibodies to Schmallenberg had also been found in British deer but no clinical signs of disease. The former president Radim Kortba reported that African Swine Fever was detected in Russia in wild boar population and that it could cause problems for exports of deer in future.

The spring meeting and AGM was held in Prague on March 21st. Again the meeting was well attended by delegates from across Europe.

Each country present also gave a brief report on their deer farming industry and also on CAP payments currently and the possibilities the new reform may bring to them. John Fletcher also gave a brief report on TB within Europe and explained the issue of the transport of deer in velvet. While it is currently illegal to transport stags in velvet several members had reported that they travelled extremely well if separately penned and that this might be more humane than releasing breeding stags in hard antler into herds of deer just before the rut when fighting was inevitable. FEDFA hoped therefore that it might be possible at our next meeting in Brussels to effect a change in this regulation.

The FEDFA web site was also discussed and plans were made to update the web site and make it more user friendly. The updates are still taking place slowly.

In the afternoon we received a very interesting lecture from Renata Vondrakova (secretary for international relationship of the Association of private Farming in the Czech Republic).

She did a great job of bringing us all up to date on the new CAP reforms that are being planned for 2015, especially the Greening aspect of the new reforms. As I write this though there remain a lot of unanswered questions which relate to Greening. We hope that the new reforms will help the deer farming industry and allow deer farmers to receive payments for farming deer across Europe. So many countries still don't recognise deer as a viable livestock enterprise.

Finally the arrangements for the Autumn FEDFA meeting were discussed. The meeting is due to be held in Poland in October.

It was very disappointing that neither BDFPA representatives, Dan DeBaerdemaeker nor John Fletcher could manage to attend the meeting held in October 2014 in Poland. This was the first time since its founding that no UK members had attended a FEDFA meeting and was especially disappointing since deer farming in Poland is making huge strides with highly sophisticated deer farms exporting venison to Germany and the UK. Any BDFPA member is welcome to attend these meetings which are always entertaining and interesting.



WHOLE CROP SILAGE AS A PARK FEED

SUPPLEMENTARY WINTER FEEDING OF PARK DEER IS ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT MANAGEMENT PRACTICES THAT HAS TO BE CARRIED OUT IN A PARKLAND SYSTEM EVERY YEAR. IT IS ALWAYS A GREAT DISCUSSION POINT DUE TO THE DIFFERENT TYPES OF FEED AVAILABLE: CONCENTRATES, HAY, SILAGE, FODDER BEET, CARROTS, ONIONS, THE LIST GOES ON. DECIDING WHAT TO FEED AND WHEN, CAN OFTEN BE A PAINSTAKINGLY LONG PROCESS WHICH FOR US STARTS THE YEAR BEFORE WE PLAN TO FEED. IT IS SOMETHING THAT YOU NEED TO GET RIGHT IF YOU WANT TO GET THE BEST OUT OF YOUR ANIMALS WITHOUT DRAMATICALLY OVER SPENDING ON BUDGETS.

When planning a winter feeding regime it is my opinion that priority should always be given to the young stock in the park as it is these animals that could suffer the most. I don't think there is a park in the country which doesn't have to consider some important points before they get to the hub of deciding what feed stuff or routine is best suited to them and will work within their constraints:

- Current feeding routines, can they be improved?
- How many deer do we have? Have we got too many deer?
- Goals/outcomes?
- Labour time
- Cross compliance
- Females' summer condition
- Pre- winter weather and predicted winter conditions
- Pre- winter forage available
- Budget/costs

Like so many parks at Woburn we are constantly looking at the way in which we feed our deer and are looking for ways to improve the feeding routines and the quality of the feed. Currently we are using a lot of concentrate feed every winter. With the cost of the concentrates going up we are always looking to reduce the amount we are feeding to save money but without reducing the quality of the feed ration and the health of the stock. The main reason for the high usage of concentrate feed is that with nine species of deer and each species having herds of mixed ages it offers the most accurate way in which to make sure each species is receiving an adequate amount of feed per head per day. We also feel that for us it is the best way to get a total feed supplement into the calves and young stock. Margins are tight and reducing the cost of winter

feed per head of deer without sacrificing quality hopefully leads to an increase in profit. Excuses for deer dying in the winter from such things as "winter death syndrome " in my view are not acceptable in an enclosure; there should be no reason for deer to be dying in large numbers in a park during the winter if pre- winter planning has been done correctly.

On top of the concentrate feed that is fed daily we try to feed the highest quality grass and lucerne silage that we can make on the estate. We are fans of lucerne silage as it offers a high protein content of around 20-22% and it makes a valuable contribution to our winter silage and feed bank with yields of about 15 tons of DM/ha per annum and it delivers a typical dry matter of 60-62% and ME of 10-11 MJ/kg. The main thing though is that the deer love it. We use big square bales as they work well in our system being fed off the back of the trailer in long lines. As the Woburn farm is predominantly an arable farm we don't have the use of feeder wagons and silage clamps.

In 2013 when planning a new area of lucerne I came across an arable silage mixture from Horizon Seeds. At Woburn the soil is predominantly a sandy loam so when selecting species and crops to be grown this has to be taken into consideration along with regular soil analysis. The mix is 40% spring barley, 40% spring peas, 20% spring oats. This delivers a typical analysis when fermented of: 30-40 % dry matter, 9-11 MJ/kg, 9-11 % Crude Protein and a pH of 4.0-4.6 according to Horizon Seeds. We tested the quality of the whole crop as we do with all our silage and the results were as follows:

Dry matter % = 36.5, pH= 3.5, crude protein % = 11.7, D-value= 60, ME (MJ/kg) = 9.6
The arable crop I thought was an ideal break crop between the old rank grass ley and the new





their milky stage but the peas had developed fully. It was at that point I realised that by accident the sods of dirt may have pushed us into the correct and right decision to precision chop the silage rather than bale it. Especially when I looked at the standing crop and saw the amount of stem/straw that there was, which would have been wastage when fed in the winter. I had the forage driver cut the crop to a good length of nearly 75 mm. I was concerned that if it was chopped too short it would be lost into the ground when fed out in the winter. From the nine hectares we achieved approximately 200 tons of forage or as we calculated approximately 250 bales worth or 22.2 tons per hectare which for a low input was near the recommended average, Horizon Seeds suggest yields of 23-25 tons per hectare. The Ag-bag can hold approximately 4.5 tons-5 tons per meter and can be a maximum length of approximately 100 meters. They are about 3 meters in width. The Ag-bag costs approximately £6-£6.50 to fill per ton. Contractor rates of approximately £163 per hectare to cut and cart the crop mean the Ag-bag system cost approximately £14.32 per ton to ensile the arable mix, which is a saving when compared to the approximate costs of contractors making baled silage from start to finish of £18.40 per ton. The overall length of our Ag-bag was about 40 meters.. It is recommended that the Ag-bag is situated on hard standing, but flat ground is fine. This allows you to situate your feed nearer to where you want it thus saving on time in the winter. So there it was; a 40 meter long 3 meter wide white sausage of 200 tons of arable whole crop.

I decided not to open the Ag-bag until late December when we were at the height of the winter feeding. I was very conscious of the fact that once the bag was opened we would have to use it all as to reseal the bag would be a challenge if possible at all. It was quickly apparent that our concerns over how to feed the silage were not needed. We found that a muck grab on the front of the tractor was more than efficient at removing the silage from the bag and loading in to a trailer. We weighed grab loads and bales and found that two grab loads on average equalled the weight of one bale. By using a grab to remove the silage we struggled to keep a flat face on the Ag bag, and did struggle to clear up all the silage from the bottom so wastage was incurred on the bottom. With the AG-bag having what is quite a small face of silage secondary fermentation was not a problem even when we were using a muck grab to remove the silage and leaving a messy front. We did make a point of using feed from the Ag-bag every other day from opening.

When it came to feeding the whole crop it was also pleasantly surprising how easy it was to feed out. We forked it off the sides of the trailer with relative ease. We slowly introduced the whole crop into the diet of the deer in the park and then into the farm where we fed it in ring feeders.

In the park we initially fed the whole crop in equal parts with the grass silage. The deer took a week to start to eat it with any meaning. After about three weeks we started to feed the whole crop on its own. We found that by putting it out in quite thick lines we didn't really experience any waste, either from the animals not eating it or it being laid on and trodden



We didn't really experience any waste..





Increase productivity and reduce costs..

into the ground. It was apparent that the intake of the animals was much greater than when feeding baled silage and that we increased the amount of whole crop we were feeding compared to when we were feeding bales. After about two weeks of just feeding whole crop the uptake slowed and we noticed silage being left. We went back to adding baleage and the intake increased again. From then on we found that feeding the whole crop with some baleage was a great combination, maybe the deer needed that longer roughage of the baleage in the rumen. The whole crop was still favoured by the animals over the baleage unless lucerne was fed with the whole crop when there was no competition: lucerne won every time.

At the end of the winter we were more than happy with the whole crop and how it had performed for us. It was a great success for us and we plan to grow it on an annual basis to form part of our winter feed ration. I don't think I will try to put it in bales after the results that were achieved in the Ag-Bag and the minimal waste that we experienced. The whole crop didn't help me save on concentrate

feed last winter however I feel that judging by the intake of the silage and the silage results, a move towards growing more specific crops for winter silage could be a strong contender in helping to reduce our concentrate usage and a move towards feeding a daily ration of silage more often seen on a cattle unit. The Arable Mix also led us to the use of Ag-Bags which again could potentially save us money on contractors and silage wrap. I would strongly recommend deer keepers to try different crops and feed stuffs to try and increase productivity and reduce costs.

For more information on the Ag-Bag system please visit www.agbag.co.uk tel: 01363 82677

For more information on Horizon seeds and Arable mixture please contact Philip Hembury: 07836290905 philip.hembury@bocmpauls.co.uk



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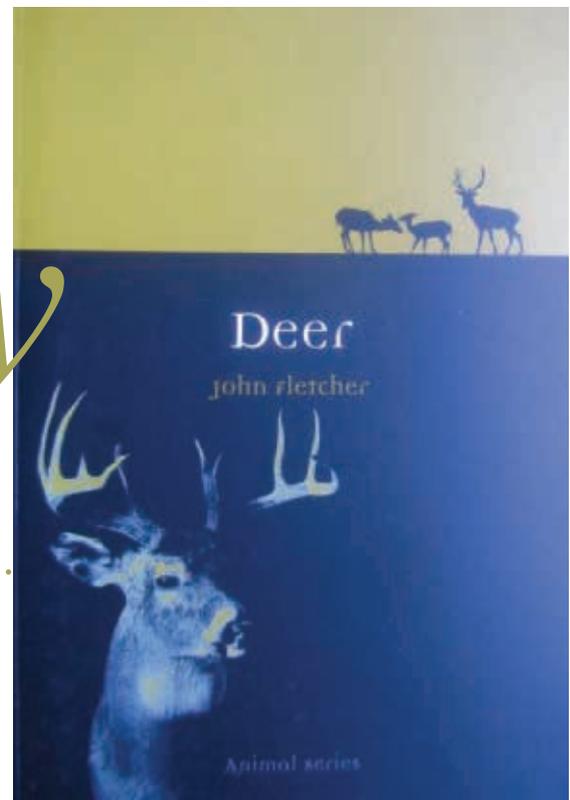
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Book. review

DEER BY JOHN FLETCHER

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Peter Green

We cannot risk these mysterious, fleetingly glimpsed, symbolically charged animals being degraded to the status of vermin or sentimentalised in a brainless anthropomorphic way' writes John Fletcher in the introduction to this excellent paperback book on deer.

At just over 200 pages the book provides a comprehensive summary of current deer science alongside a detailed synopsis of the rich history of deer in societies around the world and a challenge for the increasingly urbanised countries of the West to realise that increasing the wild deer populations cannot be ignored. This is not a veterinary textbook, but there is nothing simplistic nor dumbed down in the way that the author, who is well known and greatly respected in the veterinary deer world, has tackled the biology and physiology that make deer unique among mammals and fascinating to veterinary surgeons, biologists and conservationists alike.

The text is packed with facts and snippets that confirm how deeply deer are rooted into the fabric and development of societies the world over, from prehistoric times onwards. Deer were transported to Orkney by Neolithic mariners. While Stonehenge was being built, some 75,000 antler picks were used to mine and knap the flints at just one site at Grimes Caves in East Anglia. Eleven thousand soldiers were used to surround a mountain with a deer net in 11th century BC for a Chinese emperor to hunt. There is inevitably some repetition of material from Fletcher's earlier book on the history of deer parks (*Gardens of Earthly Delight*, Wingather, 2011), but this book stands by itself and is not principally a history or social science reference; it is a thoroughly well-researched and

engagingly written natural history. It forms one of a series, now numbering over 60 books, each devoted to one animal, from ant to elephant.

With their antlers, deer are the only mammals to possess a complicated deciduous organ, Fletcher devotes appropriate text to this seemingly wasteful feature, pointing out that it is the only mammalian structure that naturally and regularly regenerates all its skin, hairs, sweat glands, nerves and blood vessels, cartilage and bone. He describes what we know about antler development in detail and reasonably questions whether further understanding of this extraordinary cellular differentiation from an adult skull will assist in regenerative and restorative medical techniques.

There is a distinct paucity of undergraduate veterinary teaching about deer, deer farming, deer medicine and deer in general in UK veterinary facilities, despite the fact there are many millions of deer in deer farms and parks across the world and veterinary surgeons in practice are increasingly likely to be presented with deer as they become more peri-urban. More than a million deer are killed on European roads each year and about 150 human fatalities occur in these collisions, yet many UK veterinary surgeons do not know the difference between a roe deer and a fallow deer and fail to grasp the significance of castrating a pet male deer that is causing a nuisance to those who 'rescued it'. This book will be a very good place for them to start.

**Review taken from *Veterinary Record*, June 21, 2014 by kind permission of the BMJ.
www.veterinaryrecord.bmj.com
'Deer' is available from John Fletcher for only £10.**



A photograph of a herd of deer in a lush green field. The deer are of various breeds, including some with antlers. The scene is bright and natural.

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