

British Deer Farms and Parks Association **Handbook** 2015

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CHAIRMAN'S COLUMN

IT HAS BEEN A BUSY YEAR FOR THE BRITISH DEER FARMS AND PARKS ASSOCIATION; OUR EVENTS HAVE BEEN WELL SUPPORTED, WE ARE RECRUITING NEW MEMBERS AND THERE IS A MOOD OF OPTIMISM. HOWEVER I HAVE JUST BEEN PREPARING A TALK FOR THE INTERNATIONAL GAME MEAT HYGIENE RESEARCH FORUM MEETING IN EDINBURGH TOMORROW AND IT HAS COME CLEARLY TO ME JUST HOW SMALL THE BRITISH VENISON INDUSTRY REALLY IS. IN SCOTLAND OUR DEER FARMS PRODUCE ONLY ABOUT 2% OF THE TOTAL VENISON PRODUCTION – THE REST COMES FROM THE WILD. WE HAVE A VERY LONG WAY TO GO.



Nevertheless the growth in venison sales reported across all the supermarkets is undeniable. This has now been sustained for many years. Where can the venison come from to supply that continuing growth? Most of the UK venison comes from the Scottish wild red deer cull which totals about 3500 tonnes. Yet that is declining as new style landowners such as the RSPB, the National Trust, the John Muir Trust etc run their estates to maximise biodiversity rather than as traditional sporting estates. We are probably consuming about 4,500 tonnes of venison now of which perhaps 2000 are imported – we still export most roe deer carcasses and most of the rutted stags.

Compare those figures with some for Germany provided by Dan DeBaerdemaecker as a result of attendance at FEDFA meetings. Germany is the largest player in the world when it comes to buying venison. Average per head consumption is around 0.7 kg per annum which means a total of 56,000 tonnes are required annually. About half of this is imported: 10,000 tonnes from New Zealand deer farms and the rest from Eastern Europe. Enclosed deer in Germany contribute only 2,600 tonnes of venison despite having over 2000 enclosures. However the average size of these is only about 2 hectares!

The German venison market is hugely different from the British one. For the average German venison consumer the connection between hunting and venison is as light and day. Hunting is very deeply seated in their psyche. But whilst that is very true of the traditional consumer the number of those traditional consumers is declining. By contrast modern consumers are less likely to be interested in hunting and may even react negatively to the notion of eating a traditional and often to them 'old fashioned' product. By comparison the British consumer of

venison is likely to be younger and sees venison as cutting edge, a new product beloved of television chefs. And the numbers of British consumers are therefore likely to grow. German consumption gives us an idea of just how much UK demand might grow.

We remain heavily dependant on New Zealand farmed venison to supply our UK demand. This has doubled over the last three years yet, given the decline in New Zealand farmed venison production following a few years of boom in the dairy trade it would seem inescapable that there will continue to be a shortage for quite a while. At the time of writing figures suggest that New Zealand is still killing slightly more females than males demonstrating that the decline in their breeding herd is continuing and also that stags are being recruited to supply a buoyant velvet antler market. This can change quickly and, as the dairying slump continues, dairy farms, often still fenced for deer, can be restocked.

One of the most important factors in the gradual decline of the New Zealand deer farming industry has been the strength of the Kiwi dollar but now that too has changed, perhaps largely due to the collapse in the milk solids market. We can therefore expect New Zealand deer farming to benefit. Already venison prices have rallied. For the UK the continuing strength of the pound has made New Zealand venison more affordable and our



imports have doubled over the past three years and look likely to continue growing as we compete with other importing countries in the eurozone. Nevertheless if New Zealand deer farmers respond to the rise in venison price by increasing the size of their farmed deer herds we may expect to see a short term fall in the numbers of hinds being killed followed by eventually a rise in production.

One of the drivers of venison consumption is its association with health and at the conference in Edinburgh that I mentioned above, a paper was given by Professor Teresa Valencak and her colleague at the University of Veterinary Medicine in Vienna which reinforces the link between venison and good health. She investigated the nature of the fat in farmed venison in comparison to wild venison. Both meats were very low in fat but perhaps surprisingly both also showed highly favourable ratios of omega-6 to omega-3 fatty acids. These were generally much better than the normally recommended 5:1. There was no significant difference between farmed and wild venison. Fallow deer had a marginally worse ratio than red deer. She stated that: 'In all examined samples the ratio between omega-6 and omega-3 fatty acids was very healthy' and 'We thus suggest that independent of rearing mode, fatty acids composition of game meat is very beneficial for human consumption. We conclude that game meat originating from farms is just as healthy as game meat from free-ranging animals. A balanced diet in omega-6 and omega-3 fatty acids reportedly lowers the risk of suffering from coronary heart disease, improves eyesight

and memory and even helps fighting inflammatory processes in the body.'

(Reference: Teresa G.Valencak and Matthias Schreiner 'Fatty acid composition of game meat: implications for human health and variability between free-ranging and farmed game'. Abstract of paper given at the International Research Forum for Game Meat Hygiene Conference in Edinburgh, September 2015 (www.irfgmh.org))

Apart from the many open days which BDFPA has arranged this year we also took a stand at the CLA Game Fair at Harewood House in Yorkshire. Sadly as I write this the CLA has announced that it will not be holding any more Game Fairs for the next few years at least. Apparently they have not made a profit for the last three years and the CLA has decided to stop them. This is especially disappointing since our stand within the British Deer Society marquee organised by Dan DeBaerdemaecker, Julian Stoyel and Barry Poole aided, of course, by Claire Parkinson was judged a great success and attracted a lot of interest. We had hoped to continue next year. Meanwhile Tony Bennett has continued to run BDFPA stands at the Devon and Cornwall agricultural shows which is very welcome. If any members are interested in creating a presence for us at any show then let us know.

I hope that readers enjoy our conference at Tiverton and especially experience a profitable and successful year.

AND THE WAITROSE INSPIRATION AND LEADERSHIP AWARD GOES TO *Richard Elmhirst*...

What a great achievement for Dick Elmhirst and what an appropriate title for it. This award is given to recipients chosen from amongst the entire farming community so that in making this presentation to Dick, Waitrose have given us a great sign of confidence. We have all so much to be grateful for in what Dick has created at Round Green Farm. Leaping bureaucratic hurdles like an athlete, he has invested much of his life and a great deal of his resources in the construction of the abattoir at Round Green. Dick and Jenny, and Jenny's sister Judy, have worked endlessly for us all and have made

the system feasible. It is true to say that without it we would have no more than a lot of hobbyists and good lifers. As a hugely valuable spin off, Dick has created local employment for a team of great helpers who are well known and respected by all those who have ever taken deer to Round Green. The whole deer farming industry must be grateful to Waitrose for making this brilliant gesture. Waitrose have been buying farmed venison since 1981 when they took the first consignment of deer slaughtered at Glensough in Kincardineshire at £2.50/kg. Waitrose have loyally stood by us therefore continuously for 33 years! Very many thanks and heartiest congratulations, Dick and Jenny.



Growing Profitable Deer

My late father was a veterinary surgeon who had a fascinating holistic approach to treating all large animals in the 1950's. One of his many passions was the management of the Shire horses and fallow deer on the neighbouring estate. Amongst other things he was also a great advocate of ensuring that the paddocks had a good population of herbs and companion plants. He valued the utilisation of yarrow, *Achillea millefolium*, in the sward to help with bone remodelling and growth in young stock. Yarrow is a diaphoretic herb that improves blood circulation and general blood flow ensuring that growth can develop without impediment which is crucial for young shire-horses and deer alike.

In recent years as one of a rare breed of Deer Agronomists I have increasingly come to realise just how important his holistic approach is to managing the environment in which we keep deer and to realise just how inspired his ideals were.

We mustn't forget that fundamentally deer are animals of the woodland edge and forest, and that they prefer to graze on grasses, forbs (any herbaceous plant that is not grass) as well as heather and bilberry. Tree bark and shoots will often be taken to supplement a meagre diet in the winter months.

Their preferred mixed diet means that a carefully structured sward (upper layers of soil covered in grass) management plan should be developed to generate a self-sustaining environment to allow the deer to thrive.

Some key points to remember when selecting grass species:

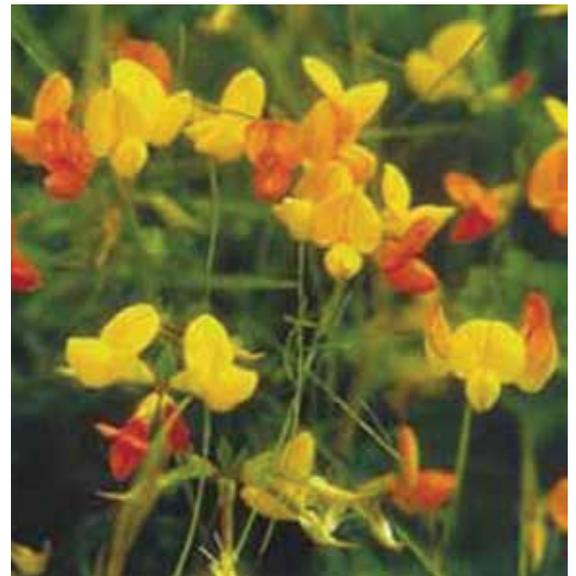
Tetraploid Ryegrass: High Dry Matter output for Silage / Haylage. Two year productive life-span

Diploid Ryegrass: High Dry Matter output for Silage / Haylage. Two year productive life-span.

Italian Ryegrass: Grazing / Silage / Haylage. Three years productive life-span

Perennial Ryegrass: Ideal grazing material, with at least a five year productive life-span. Ideally this category should include varieties that have varied flowering date so that productive value can be maintained throughout the growing season. Therefore a mixture of Early, Intermediate, Late flowering dates to ensure that peak demand is met for the deer.

Timothy: Excellent forage value from the second year onwards. It starts growing earlier in the spring than ryegrass, and also has a late growth period in the autumn. Useful perennial variety in challenging environments.



Cocksfoot: Excellent feed value, the same as perennial ryegrass but also has the advantage of an infinite life-span. Grown in all pastures throughout the United Kingdom prior to the 1940's breeding programme for ryegrass. A bunch-type grass that has a massive root mass which is ideal for stabilising soil and extracting nutrients.

Fescue Spp.

A diverse genus of grasses that confer some useful attributes into any grazing environment. Relatively low dry matter content, but invaluable for the deer to browse on.

Meadow Fescue; Tolerates acid soil with ease

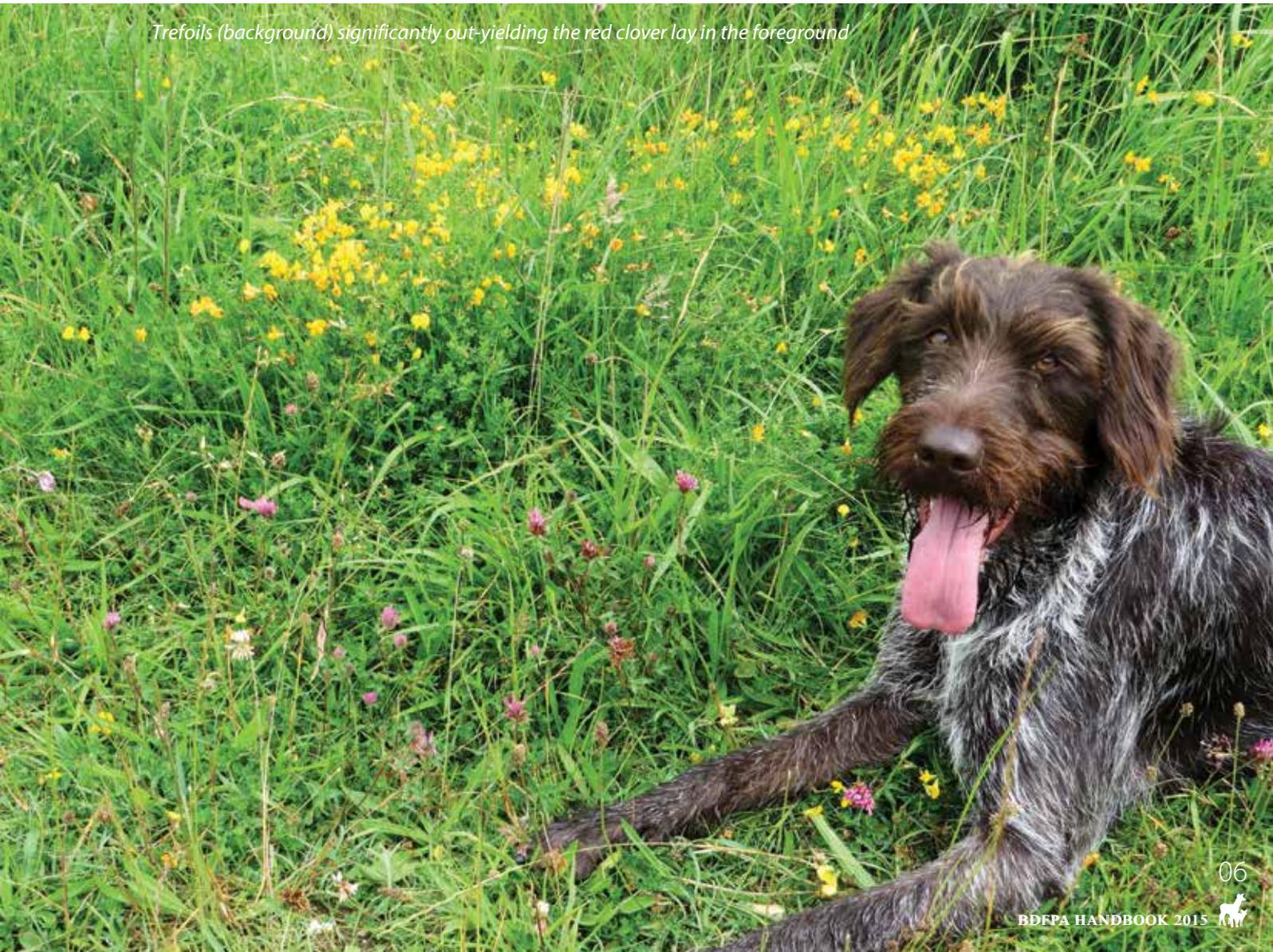
Creeping Red Fescue: Develops underground rhizomes that stabilise and populate the sward for increased productivity.

Sheep's Fescue: Generates its own mycorrhizal fungi on its roots. These fungi are crucial for maintaining a viable soil environment, and therefore this species helps to maintain the viability of any mixed sward that is growing in a less than ideal environment.

So, how do I grow Profitable Deer? This is an evolving process based on fundamental comprehensive soil analysis, combined with an evaluation of the present grass species and their condition. Finding out what is happening in the soil is crucial to allow me to balance the soil for the benefit of the grass, and therefore ensure that the deer are eating nutritious food rather than green lignin! (Just as an example, lignin is a constituent of tree bark).

Once soil and grass are efficiently talking to each other, incorporating Companion Species into the sward complements the whole improvement process. I utilise many herbaceous and complementary plants depending on the prevailing environment and the requirements of the deer and the objectives of the land owner. As an example, Trefoils, Lotus species, look fantastic, and as they are leguminous they generate a ten-fold increase in grass productivity. Free fertiliser in a natural form that complements grass growth, but without adversely increasing the sugar content of the grass. Perfect!

Trefoils (background) significantly out-yielding the red clover lay in the foreground



First Venison

Six years on...

It is now over 6 years since an initial group of eight deer farmers steered by Dick Elmhirst formed 'First Venison' in response to the need for a collective way of marketing their venison which could satisfy Waitrose's requirement for a substantive quantity of wholly British Quality Assured product. The initiative came at a time when much of the market for venison was uncertain and unstructured and the chance which First Venison provided to secure a high quality customer prepared to pay a pre-agreed price, opened up just the sort of opportunity members were keen to investigate. During the first winter season the group was in a position to supply over 900 deer meeting the required specification, and with Waitrose keen to rapidly expand the category both in terms of quantity and geographical spread across their stores, plans to increase membership were given priority. Steady growth has now seen the number of First Venison members rise to 23 and it now has a formally adopted constitution which regulates how the group is run and represented externally.

From inception, a corner stone of the group's success has been the importance placed on communication up and down the supply chain. The clear understanding of, and insight into, Waitrose's venison category has been pivotal in giving members the confidence to develop their individual businesses and this has led directly to increased stock numbers and investment in infrastructure on individual farms. Members also have the ability to feed back their own plans for business development and to highlight significant issues which impact on profitability and the practicalities of consignment. Of course the group itself provides an excellent forum for the exchange of ideas, opportunities for mentoring of new entrants and the sharing of best practice in matters such as feeding, herd health and grazing management.

All First Venison members are Quality Assured (QA) and registered with SAI Global and every deer supplied must meet QA standard. Additionally the group has agreed with Waitrose an enhanced specification for the deer which are entering their supply chain. Rather than being seen as restrictive and demanding, this more exacting protocol is perceived by members as a way of giving clear points of difference between the product

they supply and other QA deer available on the open market which is often of mixed origin and specification.

At the centre of the First Venison/Waitrose supply chain is the Round Green abattoir near Barnsley in South Yorkshire and the Dovecote Park processing facility near Pontefract in West Yorkshire. The procurement schedule for the Waitrose Autumn/Winter season which the group supplies is managed by Dovecote Park. They arrange a timetable with individual members as to how many and when required (batches, usually around 50) are to be consigned and a key point is the flexibility which can be provided helping individual members to address say winter housing or transportation issues. Rob Bunn, of Dovecote Park, with the full and enthusiastic support of co-owners, David Gunner & Richard Canvin, has been pivotal in the group's continued success, being an excellent administrator and intuitive advisor to both long standing and new entrants to the group. Round Green which is now under the management of Paul Finney and Roger Clifford, maintains its position as the country's foremost specialist deer abattoir and more than satisfies Waitrose's and First Venison member's requirement that all deer are processed with the utmost care and professionalism.

From the very beginning First Venison members have had the security of knowing that they will be paid for consigned deer promptly and that they will be fairly paid for the quantity and quality of carcasses they provide. An incentivised payment grid similar to those used by many processors for cattle and sheep has been adopted by the supply chain and it is reviewed regularly as part of the annual price review in advance of each season.

With Waitrose's aim to continue to strengthen its position as the most prominent supplier of QA venison amongst the multiple retailers, First Venison is still currently able to offer the opportunity of membership, and is pleased to offer prospective candidates the chance to meet and discuss with existing members how the group ethos of co-operative working provides a very sound model in the venison farming sector. The approach of the Waitrose/First Venison relationship mirrors the direction of the New Zealand deer industry through the P2P (Profit to Plate) initiative which embraces the concept of whole supply chain improvement. Group members





Waitrose



understand that as well as acting co-operatively they will achieve maximum benefit by 'buying in' to the idea of developing on farm performance through taking note of, and seeking to improve, key performance indicators, husbandry techniques and genetics. Some members are already pursuing genetic improvement by the use of AI and ET and others are conducting feed and forage trials. The group is also fully supportive in the development of the deer health scheme to provide an effective protocol engaging with bovine TB.

First Venison has developed to its current strength on the secure market arising from the public's recognition of the high quality product which is British Quality Assured farmed venison and is very pleased to be able to partner with Waitrose in responding to the resulting demand. The opportunities provided by collaborative working are becoming more and more obvious to many sectors of British Agriculture and First Venison members are pleased to be part of this movement and reaping the benefits which follow.

Stephen Greenfield
& Simon Pike

"Since establishing the First Venison supply chain, I have enjoyed progressing the scheme with an engaging and progressive group of deer farmers, seeing it go from strength to strength. We look to the future with optimism for all partners within our supply chain."

Rob Bunn – Dovecote Park, Venison Supply Manager



The Management of Calving Red Deer on a Deer Farm

I HAVE BEEN CALVING DEER ON OUR PROPERTY FOR OVER 30 YEARS AND EACH YEAR I FEEL WE IMPROVE OUR MANAGEMENT. IN THE DEER CALENDAR IT IS THE MOST IMPORTANT PERIOD AND WILL DETERMINE HOW MANY CARCASSES YOU WILL HAVE TO SELL. OUR AIM IS ALWAYS TO TRY AND ACHIEVE 90% CALVING AT WEANING. THIS WOULD ALSO INCLUDE ANY HINDS THAT ARE IN CALF AS WELL AS ANY CALVES THAT DIE UP TO WEANING.

Tony Bennett - Chilton Deer Farm

The management starts in the winter and we aim to have the hinds in average condition by the end of the winter. They are only fed good silage and rotated around our paddocks so fresh grass is gorged every two weeks. The main aim is not to have the hinds in too good condition in mid May when they start calving. During the early spring the calves/yearlings are turned out. They will have the best grass and the hinds are used to clean up.

Preparation of the calving paddocks

We calve the deer in two calving blocks, running 3 hinds to the acre. In early spring an area in each calving block is fenced off with 3 electric wires so by calving time there is good long grass so they can hide their calves. If you do not have cover for the calves, the hinds and calves will become stressed and the calves will try and get through the netting.

All the fences are thoroughly checked, especially gaps under the fences and gateways. Do not calve deer where there are muddy ditches where they can become stuck and perish.

The hinds are split into their groups 10 days before calving so that they are well settled. We usually mix the first calvers in with the older hinds as this keeps them more settled. The older hinds are more aware of predators.

It is important that you have a good bank of good quality grass as well as the long grass which was shut up because it is not a good idea to move your deer until the calving is finished because this will cause stress in the hind and possibly very young calves being abandoned.

Occasionally in drought years, some supplementary feeding will be required, but it must be of the best quality such as red clover silage.

Calving Management

At first the hinds are checked once a day, usually on foot or by truck. Great care must be taken not to disturb calves and one must not start looking for them. If the hinds become agitated on entering their field it is best to leave the field immediately. On a commercially run operation I do not recommend tagging calves as this will upset the hinds. In general the hinds will calve alone, with no assistance. However, occasionally there will be a calving problem.





This is always a difficult situation to deal with unless she is a very quiet hind and can be led into a race or holding paddock. Both our calving blocks lead into a holding paddock. If a hind needs attention I may take a couple of days walking her as near to this paddock without disturbing the other hinds. A little corn will help and with some assistance I will quickly put an electric fence around her so we can gently persuade her into the holding paddock next to the yards. I will try to calve the animal myself otherwise a vet is called. We very rarely lose a hind but in nearly all cases the calf will sadly die. If you need to handle a calf then gloves are essential to prevent human scent being left on the calf.

After Calving Management

When you have the hinds and calves on the fresh pasture for the first time you must open the gate without the hinds seeing it being opened, otherwise there is a stampede through the gateway and calves will hit the fence. Feed a little corn the other end of the field and they will then in general, just trickle through calmly. Check every area thoroughly in the field so that calves are not left behind after you shut the gate.



Once you have reached this period in early July, a high percentage of calves will have been born and I find the hinds will become much quieter and relaxed again.



Rearing Orphan Calves

One of the subjects which crops up each spring is the rearing of orphan deer calves. People regularly phone me for advice on this although I think most manage to resolve problems themselves. For those who have experience of this subject please forgive me for re-visiting the subject. Clare Adam and I wrote a short chapter in the book *Management and Diseases of Deer* many years ago and I have borrowed most of the following from that piece.

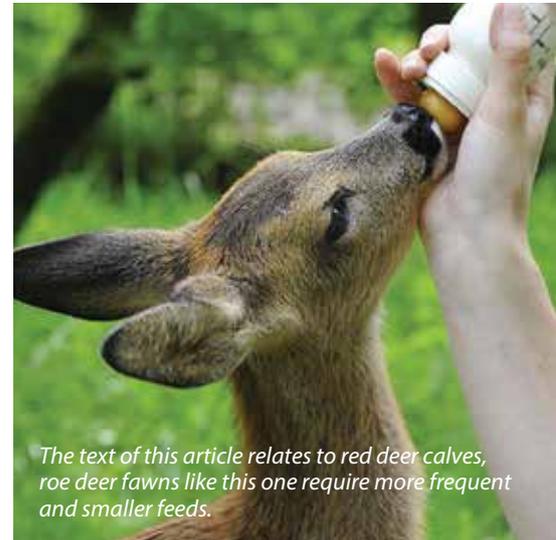
Orphan calves, like orphan lambs, tend to be a nuisance in a farmed herd, although always very popular with tourists. The practice of removing calves from the wild for hand rearing is illegal in Great Britain as it is in breach of the close seasons, although it was used extensively experimentally under licence to establish government sponsored deer farms and research projects in the 1970's.

Nevertheless, there may be rare occasions when calves have been orphaned or deserted and require hand rearing. It is essential to establish first that the calf has in fact been abandoned. Members of the public finding a calf, frequently a roe kid, lying by itself with no sign of its mother, inevitably and understandably leap to the conclusion that it has been abandoned, particularly if, when they touch it, it obeys its instincts to freeze. In such cases it is well worth taking the animal back provided it has not been away more than perhaps 6 hours, returning 12 hours later to see if the mother has removed it.

If this is not the case, and all else fails, the animal can be hand reared. This of course, is a substantial undertaking, at least for the first week or fortnight during which calves require feeding every three to four hours. Initially attempts to feed by bottle, using a lamb teat with a cross shaped slit in it may be unsuccessful, but after 36 to 48 hours this should be accepted. If not, then attempts to encourage drinking from a bowl may be more successful. It goes without saying that some liquid must be given during the first 24 hours either by force feeding with a teat or by introducing a lamb stomach tube.

During the first month, when feeding the calf, it is worth using a damp cloth to massage around the anus as this mimics the licking of the dam and stimulates defaecation. A check can then be kept on the consistency of the faeces and they can be removed to prevent the bedding being soiled.

The hind produces a concentrated, high fat, high protein, low lactose milk compared with the ewe and the cow (Table 1), but there are various milk



The text of this article relates to red deer calves, roe deer fawns like this one require more frequent and smaller feeds.

substitutes which may be used to successfully raise orphan red deer calves. Commercial ewe milk replacers (20% solids) are suitable. Bovine calf milk replacers are not, because if mixed at a suitable concentration to provide adequate fat and protein, lactose concentrations become intolerably high and induce scouring. Deer calves have been reared in Australia on undiluted evaporated cow's milk. In New Zealand fresh full cream cow's milk has been used with the following additions per litre: one egg (yolk or whole), 5ml cod liver oil (one teaspoonful) and 20g glucose (one tablespoonful). This has been used very successfully on many occasions in Great Britain also.

TABLE 1

AVERAGE COMPOSITION (EXPRESSED AS A PERCENTAGE) OF MILK FROM A RED DEER HIND, EWE AND COW			
	DEER	EWE	COW
Total solids	22.0	19.0	13.0
Fat	9.5	7.4	3.7
Protein	7.4	5.5	3.5
Lactose	4.5	4.8	4.8

Feeds should be regular and of consistent formulation, any necessary changes being carried out gradually to avoid nutritional scouring. Milk should be given warm (37°C), initially in a bottle equipped with a commercially available rubber lamb teat, and later in a bottle, open container or multiple-suckling unit. Whatever the chosen method, good hygiene is vital. Care must be taken not to overfeed as the calf cannot digest an excessive volume of milk even though it is willing to accept it. Thus frequent small feeds are offered for the first few days, with amounts increasing and frequency decreasing subsequently. A suggested programme for feeding the red deer calf is given in Table 2, but this is only intended as a guide and should be amended accordingly if the calf does not progress well. Liveweight gains should be comparable with those of naturally reared calves (330 to 350g per day) and should not fall below 2kg per week.

The recommended quantities of milk should be approximately halved for fallow deer fawns and further decreased proportionally for the smaller roe kid.

TABLE 1

FEEDING PROGRAMME FOR THE ORPHAN RED DEER CALF			
Age	No. of feeds per 24 hours	Volume per feed (ml)	Comments
Day 1	4-5	50-100	Ensure colostrum is fed
Day 2	5	80-120	
Day 3	5	150	
Day 4	4	200-250	Offer dry grass or hay
Day 5	4	250	
Day 6	4	250-300	Fresh water available
Day 7	4	300	
Day 8	3	400	Peat available
Day 9	3	400-500	
Day 10-14	3 reducing to 2	500 rising to 750	Offer concentrates Increase solids
Week 2-3	2	800-900	
Week 3+	2	1000	

Obstinate calves that are unwilling to suckle may be fed via a stomach tube as it is important to avoid dehydration. It is also important for the development of a healthy calf that it receives colostrum within 24 hours post-partum, the sooner the better. If a hind has rejected her calf following an assisted birth, colostrum can be obtained by sedating the hind, injecting with oxytocin and either hand milking or encouraging the calf to suckle. Alternatively, the calf may be given hind, ewe or cow colostrum which has been collected in advance and stored frozen for emergency use. If none of these are available then an artificial colostrum formula may be used.

Orphan deer calves are generally housed at least during the early stages and at night. They start to nibble solid food from an early age and a clean water supply and pasture grass, dried grass food or good quality short hay should be offered ad lib from within the first week. Young calves show a keen interest in eating soil and an ad lib supply of fresh garden peat or earth has proved beneficial for the health and contentment of housed orphan calves. Palatable high-energy concentrates (mixes based on cereals) should be introduced from about two to three weeks. The



quantities consumed will vary from calf to calf but generally do not become appreciable until about six weeks. Intakes of solids may be encouraged prior to weaning by a gradual reduction in the volume of milk given. Calves may be weaned as early as eight weeks but are generally better left on milk feeding until at least three months or at least 35kg live weight. Once weaned, they may be fed, indoors or outdoors, as naturally weaned calves.



Calibres for Farm & Park Deer

Steve Bowers
Specialist Rifle Service Limited

Introduction

Suitability of any firearm for the task in hand is not only a necessary and humane need but also has legal implications. Add this to the dilemma for the need to provide untainted and un-contaminated venison on a regular basis and it soon becomes apparent that park and farm owner's requirements differ from those of the usual recreational stalker.

Although the deer themselves remain the same in both processes, primarily red or fallow, there still remain differences towards the approach of which calibre is best for a humane instant dispatch. You also have to consider the need of safety for the surrounding deer as well as public, other livestock and machinery.

So as a custom rifle smith, here are a few pointers I have found useful over the years in developing equipment for precision and lethality.

Farm or Park

I believe the differences between park and farmed deer are well defined and thus it is clear cut what calibre is most suitable. This is because, although the calibres I suggest are good for both, legal requirements limit the use of suitable calibres for park deer.

Farmed deer are not classed as wild. This is because they are confined within a deer proof area and deemed by the Food Standards Agency as not being kept in a manor similar to wild deer. This means, in my opinion, that there are no legal limits to open or closed shooting seasons or restrictions to calibres of use. This greatly enhances the ability to use the best possible scenario and rifle for the job in my view*.

On the flip side, the park deer herds, being more free roaming come under the current Deer Act and thus open and close seasons apply, as do restrictions to the calibres and velocities of the round as well as projectile type.

What Calibre?

Common to both is the need for a fast, light and frangible bullet i.e. one that requires little trajectory compensation for range and one that enters and then expands rapidly to minimise ricochets and ensures no exit wounds, yet maximise disruption of the internal tissues for an instant, humane death. Also smaller, faster projectiles recoil less and therefore you can shoot and reload quickly for a second shot as necessary. Sound moderators further reduce recoil and noise, enhancing the shooter's ability for a more accurate shot. You also have the benefit that neighbours are less likely to be disturbed.

Farm Deer:- With no legal calibre restrictions you have the best choice and my favourite calibres at your disposal.

Here a high velocity .20 and .22 centrefire calibre is ideal. This is due to the fact that bullet weights from 39 grains to 55 grains are ideal for this calibre and are constructed at manufacture to have a hollow or polymer tip that initiates a consistent and rapid expansion of the bullet when it hits. This ensures that all the kinetic energy from the projectile is dissipated within the deer and the bullet does not pass through risking a ricochet or injuring another deer.

Here I favour the lighter .20 Tactical and .20 PPC rounds. This is due to the fact that the load with 39gr or 40gr bullet velocities from 3700 fps and 4100 fps can be achieved. This has several advantages, the trajectory is flat i.e. if zeroed at 200 yards range it is still only one inch high at 100 yards and only 0.5 inches low at 250 yards. Therefore at normal ranges in a farm scenario you aim dead on which lessens the risk of miss and ensures an accurate shot replacement.

Other calibres such as .222, .223 and .22-250 with bullets ranging from 40 grains to 55 grains are also very suitable for the same reasons as the 20 cal but I get asked more for the fast stepping .20 cal cartridges these days.

Park Deer:- With restrictions on open seasons, calibre limitations apply. As such, the smallest legal calibre is .240 (6mm) and that must also have a muzzle energy of 1750ft/lbs and use a bullet that has an expanding nature, i.e. soft point or hollow. In real terms, the .243 Win, 6mm Rem, 6mmx47L and 6mmBR are the logical candidates. However, bullet choice is crucial as 6mm bullet weights can be sourced from 55 grains all the way up to 115 grains. The trouble is that not all of these bullets are light enough or fast expanding enough as many are designed for stalkers that need a bullet to penetrate deep and then expand. That is why in .243/6mm you will need to choose a fast, lighter projectile like the .22 centrefire. Here a 55 grain to 70 grain hollow or polymer tipped i.e. ballistic tip type bullet is recommended.

A .243 55 grain bullet achieves 3800 fps whilst a 70 grain bullet does 3500-3600 fps, depending on barrel length. Trajectories are not quite as flat as with the .20 and .22 centrefire but are sufficient with added advantage of a higher kinetic energy value. All bullets need to expand within the beast and not on exit.

Shot Placement

The reason the fast frangible bullet is ideal in these situations is because you should be aiming (no pun intended!), for a head or neck shot. It ensures an instant, lethal kill that drops the deer where it stands. It not only minimises the risk of ricochets, hitting other deer causing secondary wounding and spooking the other deer, it also does not spoil the venison.

With a head or neck shot and a frangible bullet, there is usually no exit wound and the smaller bullets break up quickly so do not carry contamination to a larger area. Thus galloching and meat preparation is vastly improved. However, these light bullets should not be used for body shots.

Head and neck shots need good shot placement so here are my recommendations:

From the rear:- a shot at the head should be taken from between the ears and just below the atlas joint. This ensures an instant, humane shot.

From the side:- a bullet should be placed below the ear and towards the back of the head and neck.

From the front:- very important to place the shot correctly, NOT between the eyes as this can enter the nasal cavity and not allow total lethality to the brain or spinal cord. You must place the shot at the Adam's apple to cause trauma to the spinal cord and instant death.

** The view that farmed deer are exempt from the firearms restrictions imposed by legislation is not endorsed by the BDFPA (Editor).*



Above: Light weight 20 cal 40gr 22 at right

Shooting position

Another very important consideration is the manner and area in which you take the shot. Deer are not stupid as we all know, and they can differentiate between a human with a walking stick and one with a rifle very quickly once shot at in the herd. Therefore, sitting different positions around the park or farm to be used as hides; either elevated as a high seat or platform or on the ground is preferable to shooting in plain sight or after arriving on a quad or 4x4. As soon as the deer see or hear the vehicle, they will be gone.

The rifle should also be covered when you enter the hide and when a shot or shots are taken. Leave the rifle in the hide when you retrieve the deer to eliminate the association between you and the rifle.

Feeding areas located near to the hide or high seat establish a positive and regular feeding regime for the deer. Feed with high protein pellets, hay or alfalfa in specific areas to ensure a more controlled approach to culling and making it safer for you. Small considerations make all the difference.

Plan the number you have to shoot, divide into weekly programmes and divide this into different areas so deer are more relaxed, benefiting the deer and the venison as the end product. One last thought.....

ALWAYS shoot within your capabilities to ensure humane kills. Bring in outside marksmen if necessary, situated in other hides at the same time to maximise your advantage.

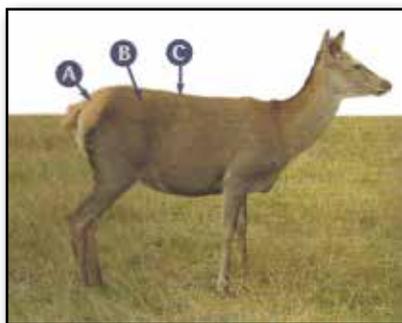


Above: A40gr 20 cal and 40gr 22 cal



Above: This shows the difference between a heavy bullet passing through (top) and a high velocity light one expanding with no exit (bottom).

PREDICTING THE *Live Body Con*



Benefits of live body condition scoring include:-

- Maximise financial returns from processed animals
- Ensure processors meet their market specifications
- Potential to save on feeding costs
- Complements the BDFPA Quality Assurance Schemes
- Prevents welfare problems
- Reduces susceptibility to diseases
- Improves hind conception rates

Live Body Condition Scoring

Condition scoring is a subjective handling technique to assess how much muscle and fat an animal is carrying and is also indicative of body reserves.

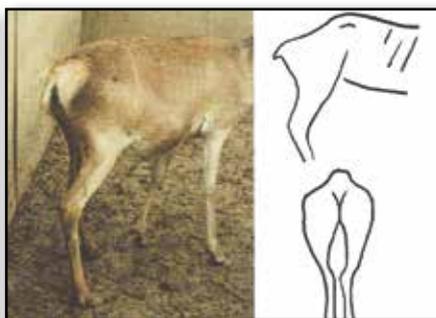
Ideally, condition scoring should be undertaken in the race prior to weighing, this will allow any changes in body condition score or live weight to be reconciled.

Condition scoring should be undertaken where possible by the same person. This will ensure consistent results, enabling a comparison between individuals in one group and the monitoring of any changes over a period of time.

Details of Live Condition Scores (1-5)

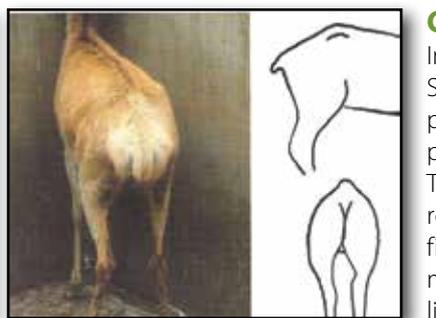
The amount of fat and muscle cover is given on a scale of one to five, with one being 'very lean' and five being 'excessively fat':

- (A) Rump region between the wings of pelvis and tail head
- (B) Transverse processes over the lumbar vertebrae
- (C) Spinous processes



Condition score: 1 (Very Lean)

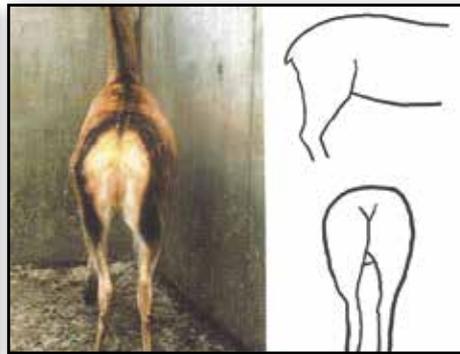
Images and drawing
Score 1: The spinous and transverse processes are prominent and sharp. The fingers can be pushed easily under the transverse processes and each process can be felt. The loin and rump muscles are thin and have no fat cover.



Condition score: 2 (Lean)

Images and drawing
Score 2: The spinous processes are prominent but smooth, individual processes being felt only as corrugations. The transverse processes are smooth and rounded but it is still possible to press the fingers underneath. The loin and rump muscles are of moderate depth but with little fat cover.

Condition OF FARMED RED DEER



Condition score: 3 (Prime)

Images and drawing

Score 3: The spinous processes are smooth and rounded; bone is felt only with pressure. The transverse processes are also smooth and well covered; hard pressure with the fingers is needed to find the ends. The loin and rump muscles are full, with a moderate fat cover.



Condition score: 4 (Fat)

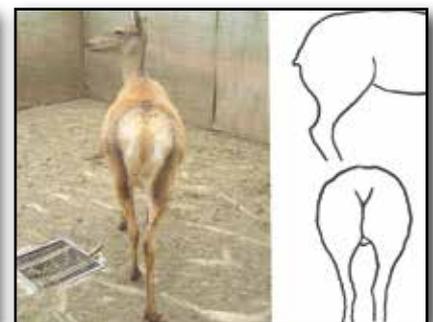
Images and drawing

Score 4: The spinous processes are detectable only as a line; the ends of the transverse processes cannot be felt. The loin and rump muscles are full and have a thick covering of fat.

Condition score: 5 (Over Fat)

Images and drawing

Score 5: The spinous processes cannot be detected even with pressure. There is a dimple in the fat layers where the processes are positioned. The transverse processes cannot be detected. The loin and rump muscles are very full, rounded and covered with very thick fat.



Guidelines for undertaking live condition scoring:-

- Deer need to be standing naturally but with restricted movement.
- Condition scoring should be undertaken where possible by the same person.
- The assessor should use the tips of fingers and thumb.
- Always condition score with the same hand from the same side.
- Minimise the time between selection and slaughter, ideally three days should be the maximum.
- If a deer becomes agitated and uncooperative, then it should be released immediately.
- Ensure the working environment is safe for both deer and assessor.
- To obtain consistent and reliable results assessors should reconcile live condition scores with carcass classification scores.
- Occasional visits by assessors to an abattoir to inspect deer carcasses, is an valuable exercise.

A point of View



QUALITY ASSURANCE SCHEMES

A day or two ago, John said that he was having a meeting about the new BDFPA Quality Assurance Scheme. 'What, another one, what's this one about?' I thought. My mind started wandering back to the very many marketing and QA schemes that have been created, at goodness knows how many hours of voluntary time. I know, because I've been involved with at least three; two of them quality assurance schemes.

The first was way back in the 1980s when the British Deer Farmers Association decided to create a Quality Standard Mark for farmed venison. Actually, in a rather far-sighted move, Alasdair Darroch, chair of the Venison Promotion Committee at the time, thought that it should not be restricted to farmed venison because one day, parks might want to be included. So it was simply called British Prime Venison and any venison that could comply with the standards could use the mark.

As an historical aside that one or two older statesmen may remember, I recall that, in the fast moving 1980s world of deer farming when some people imagined vast fortunes were to be made out of trade marks and logos, one over enthusiastic entrepreneur tried to nip in and register British Prime Venison as his own trade mark. Fortunately we were able to remind him that an individual cannot own a name containing the word 'British', so he had to subside back into his box.

Anyway, looking back on it, the original British Prime Venison scheme with its Code of Practice for the Sale of Farmed Venison was an admirable one because not only did it cover all the usual requirements of animal production, animal welfare, slaughter and food hygiene, but it set some benchmarks for what as a cook and consumer of venison, I would call the most crucial elements of a quality assurance scheme, namely the eating quality of the meat. We set the 'Prime Venison' age as being under 27 months because the research coming out of New Zealand shear tests at the time indicated that after that age, the meat of male red deer

started to toughen. I've done tasting sessions with many people since, who can appreciate the difference in tenderness between venison from 18-month old deer and 4-year olds. Also, well grown males could start to have rutting taint after that age. New Zealand trials also found that venison from red deer hinds remains tender until they are much older - around 5 or 6, but at the time, hinds were far too valuable to be used for venison. So that 27-month age band was used for decades to set quality and price structures. Now I get the sense that it is slipping away into the background, and age is not perhaps being regarded as so important.

Of course I realise that supermarkets require their suppliers to provide them with some sort of approved assurance scheme that will cover production of the live animal, so feedstuffs, country of origin, animal welfare, transport and slaughter form the first part of any QA scheme, and food hygiene, cutting and packing, transport, and so on form the second. Actually, the Food Standards Agency and to some extent Environmental Health services take care of food hygiene anyway nowadays. Grading of carcasses came a little later but was another crucial way of ensuring that the finest quality of carcass could be rewarded.

But not enough Quality Assurance schemes nowadays touch on the eating quality of the meat. I find this disappointing because most British consumers today pretty well take for granted that their meat is going to fulfil acceptable standards of production and welfare. What they really want to know is whether the venison they buy will be properly trimmed and butchered, and that it will be nice and tender and tasty with any chewy bits trimmed off. I appreciate that eating quality is rather a subjective thing, but surely the age of the animal is one fairly crucial benchmark that is easily identified. Even with wild and park deer, any competent ranger or stalker can tell if the deer is under three years old.

Now I realise that venison from deer older than three can be superb, especially if the carcass has been nicely matured. And experienced chefs can of course

cook young and old venison to melt-in-the-mouth perfection. But the inexperienced person cannot. So if they encounter a venison steak that dries out and toughens, they will not be inclined to buy it again, from anywhere, which is a shame for all the people selling young venison. And how can they know what they are buying?

Having spent years cooking venison of all ages, both wild and farmed, my experience has been that venison from old animals, even when the tough sinews have been trimmed off, is far more tricky to cook to pink. In a casserole, braise, or as mince the age is not so important, but steaks and roasts are a different matter. It doesn't matter whether it's farmed or wild. In a casserole, braise, or as mince, that's fine. Young venison is fairly forgiving about the amount of time it takes to cook it and rest it in order for it to remain nice and pink, moist and tender, but when the venison is older, the time between the meat being too undercooked and it becoming overcooked and dry, shortens. So ultimately you have a situation where the meat looks fine to the cook, but by the time it has reached the table, or even in the time between serving the meat and it being eaten, the juiciness has come out of the meat, leaving it dry. I don't know of any research to corroborate this personal finding, but it seems to me that in older venison the muscle contracts more readily and squeezes the moisture out. Whatever the physical cause, the net result is venison that is far more difficult for the inexperienced person to cook. That's what concerns me.

Other meat producing sectors differentiate between animals of different ages - lamb and mutton being an obvious example. Some people may prefer one, some another but at least they can make an informed choice about what they are buying. When, as an experiment, we sold some of our older (ie not Prime) venison as 'venison mutton', explaining carefully the difference between the two, customers were happy to try them both. So, should we perhaps coin different names for different ages? And as an industry, shouldn't we be looking at some indication of the preferred age in these quality schemes, please? It would be interesting to have a debate about this.

British Prime Venison

British Deer Producers Society

Food from Britain Quality Assurance Scheme

Scottish Farmed Venison

Farm Assured Scottish Livestock Scheme

Venico

BDFPA Quality Assurance Scheme

Scottish Quality Wild Venison

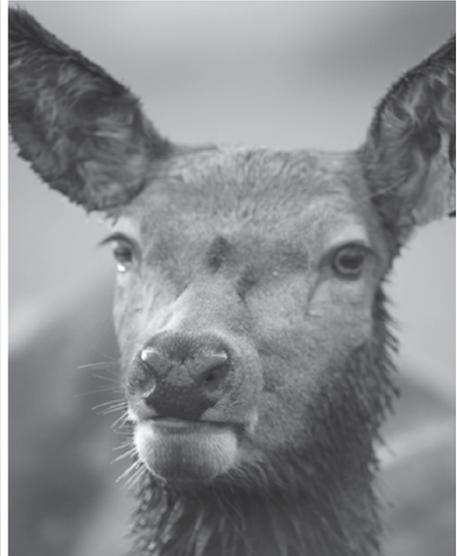
BDFPA Quality Assurance Scheme for Parks

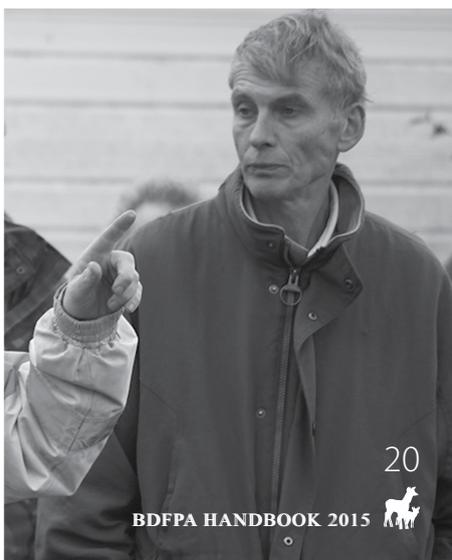




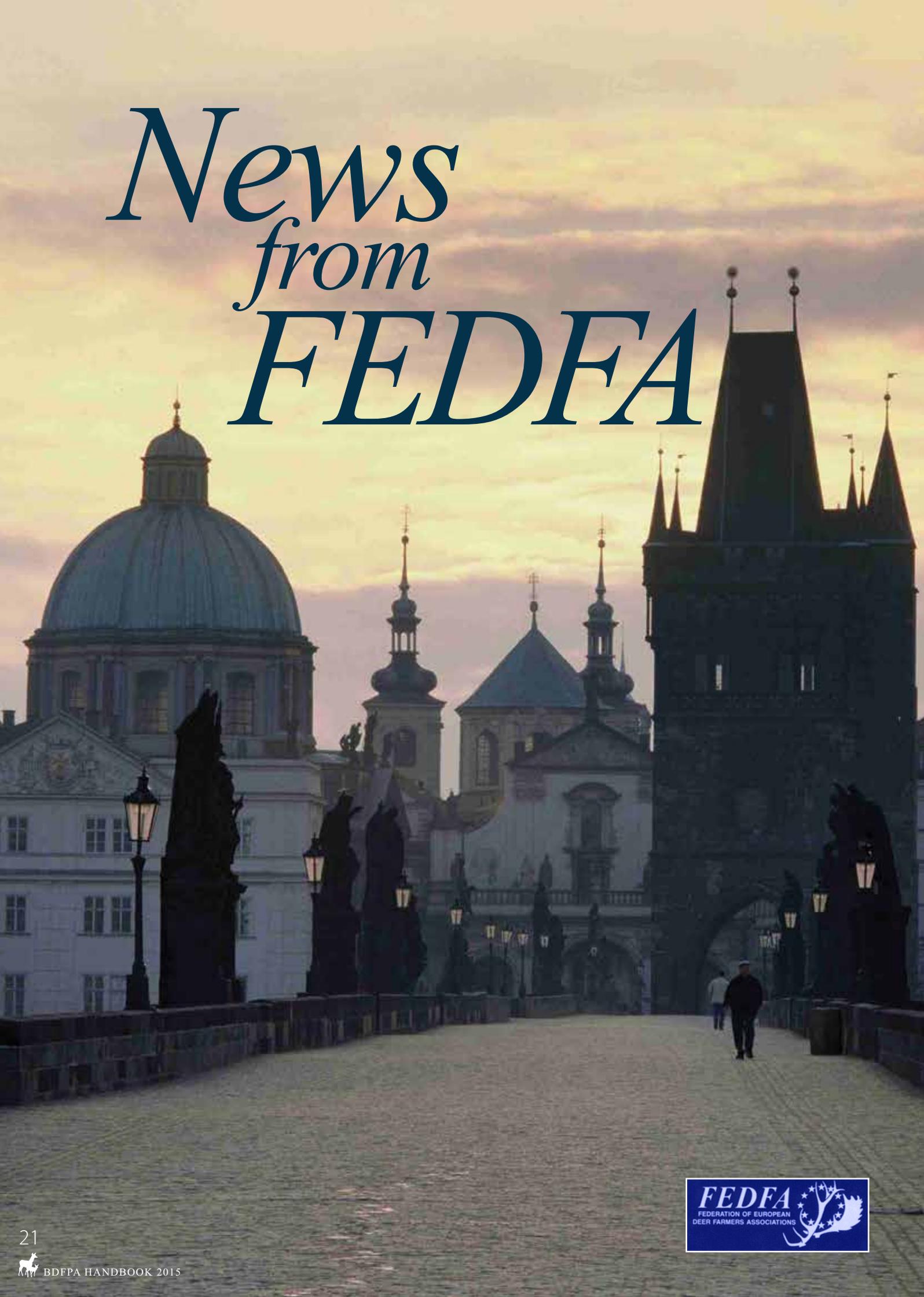
Conference Photos

2014 Moffat, UK





News from FEDFA



VICE CHAIR OF BDFPA, DAN DEBAERDEMAECKER IS ALSO THE UK REPRESENTATIVE FOR THE FEDERATION OF EUROPEAN DEER FARMERS' ASSOCIATIONS (FEDFA). FEDFA HAD ITS SPRING MEETING IN PRAGUE ON MARCH 26TH.

Each member country is allowed to have two representatives and John Fletcher has been the second UK rep for many years but was unable to go to the Prague meeting. In addition the autumn meetings are open to anyone who is a BDFPA member and generally include visits to deer farms. This year the autumn meeting is being held in Norway at the end of September.

Dan reported from Prague that there were some new developments. Thus Russia has now joined FEDFA and the constitution will need to be amended to take account of the admission of non-EU members. In addition there was a call to broaden the FEDFA concept to take account of all deer enclosures not just those intended for venison production.

FEDFA has always struggled on a very limited budget to get closer to the bureaucrats in Brussels who draft regulations and this year as normal there was discussion of this. On a related topic there was debate about agricultural subsidies under the new CAP regime. The achievement after many years of lobbying in Scotland for deer farmers to receive support on an area basis was welcomed and many member states wish to follow this although of course many already have it.

Perhaps the greatest subject for discussion was the difference between states in their interpretation of the hygiene regulations with regard to slaughter of enclosed deer. If we think we have some difficulty in differentiating between parks and farms have sympathy with Germany. Germans consume 56,000 tonnes of venison per annum (about 0.7 kg/head) of which about 25,000 are imported. 10,000 tonnes come from New Zealand deer farms and the rest from Eastern Europe. Enclosed deer contribute 2,600 tonnes (9.7%) to this with well over 2000 enclosures of which the average size is only about 2 hectares! The costs of a veterinary ante-mortem inspection within 72 hours of shooting are obviously unworkable when only one or two deer may be shot at any one time so the interval between inspection and shooting was increased to 28 days in some cases. Now however it is proposed that veterinary ante-mortem inspection be replaced by someone who has been trained – the same as the trained hunter system adopted in the UK for shooting wild deer.

Clearly if Germany is successful in negotiating the use of 'trained persons' instead of vets to carry out ante-mortem inspections on deer farms this could open the door to the same procedures in the UK for deer killed on farms. Obviously for deer going to abattoirs this is much less of an issue. FEDFA is also looking into the marketing of venison across the member states where there are several restrictions on some states limiting where it can be sold and to whom it can be sold. Understanding other countries' deer farming, management and problems is key to trying to strengthen the European deer industry.

Systems within Europe



Austria

Deer farming in Austria started about thirty years ago. With mainly fallow deer to utilise grassland for meat production. There are currently 838 farms in the Austrian association and there are estimated to be 1623 farms in Austria. The average farm is only 6 hectares with the average farm only stocking 18 hinds. Breeding hinds are worth 600-800 euro's each and breeding stags averaging 1500-2000 euro's per stag. Most deer are culled on farm with free bullet and sold directly from the farm to the consumer. Carcasses are achieving between 4.5-5.5 euro's/kg.



Germany

Deer farming started in 1972 with fallow deer to research their ecological use as an alternative to cattle and sheep on grassland. There are now nearly 4000 deer farms farming approximately 176,000 deer. There are 11 regional deer associations within Germany with a total of approximately 1500 members in total.

The average farm size is 2.4 hectares. Approximately 11,500 hectares are farmed with deer in Germany. Farms have to be licensed and have to be over 1 hectare in size. Slaughter on farm is allowed, carcasses then have to be inspected and stamped. Most farms market their own venison locally. Germany has one of the largest consumptions of venison in Europe. They consume approximately, 0.7kg of venison per head. Germany produces about 31,000 tons of venison and imports a further 25,000 tons mainly from New Zealand, but cheaper imports from Eastern Europe are increasing – see above.

On a side note the Germans are also not allowed to feed wild deer, they have to be within a fence to be able to feed deer. In southern Germany TB has been recognised in cattle and wild deer probably as a result of contact with infected wild boar crossing from Austria. There is no requirement to test deer.



Denmark

Deer farming started in Denmark in the early 1980's. There are approximately 400 farms. If you have more than 5 deer you are classed as a deer farm. There are estimated to be 12,000 breeding fallow females and 2000 breeding red females on farms. Deer on the farms are classed as domestic livestock and red meat so have to be ante- and post mortem inspected. Denmark's estimated venison production is 100 tons and is all consumed within Denmark. Denmark also imports a further 200 tons mainly from NZ. Since 1993 it has been illegal to house deer inside.

Bovine tuberculosis was imported in deer into Denmark in the mid 80's. Denmark implemented and completed a compulsory eradication program for TB on deer farms.

There are currently 125 members of the Danish association – estimated to be 60 members with herds greater than 10 breeding females and 65 members with less than 10 breeding females.

Prices for venison vary from 10 Euros/kg – 17 Euros per/kg for the prime cuts.



Czech Republic

The first deer farm was set up in 1983 in the former Czechoslovakia. There were 150 members of the Czech association in 2010. The number of farms now exceeds 500. Two thirds farms farm fallow and one third farm red deer with a total of about 10,000 animals being farmed. There are now 40 registered places that can slaughter deer. Prices for skinned carcasses are about 5-7 Euros per kg and 3-4 Euros for skin on carcasses. In the Czech Republic pre-movement TB testing of all deer is required.





Norway

Unlike the rest of Europe Norway does not have a history of keeping deer in parks or enclosures. Deer farming really started in the early 1980's. The first farm was established in 1984.

Norway currently has 110 members in their association from 92 deer farms. The average farm has about 40 females. Norway produces nearly 170 tons of farmed venison. In addition Norwegian hunters cull more than 38,000 wild red deer every year providing a further 2000 tons.

The average price for venison is 15-20 Euros per kg. There are about 30 private slaughter houses that look after the 92 deer farms.

Norwegians eat more than 300,000 tons of meat per year so this is a great incentive for farming deer in Norway.



Poland

Deer farming was only legalised in Poland in 2002.

At this time there was maybe only 20-30 deer farms farming mainly fallow deer with some farming red deer. Currently there are estimated to be at least 200 deer farms. There are estimated to be approximately 10,000 fallow deer farmed and approximately 30,000 red deer. Most farms are small in size, average deer farm size is 20 hectares. The largest deer farm in Poland has 3000 head of stock.

The biggest problem for Polish deer farmers is the sale of venison, in skin carcasses achieve between 1.5-3 euros/kg and skinned carcasses 3-6 euros/kg. There is a lack of clear legislation relating to the slaughter and sales of venison. There is only one specialised slaughter house currently in the country. The definition of deer farms or parks and the use of free bullet or hunting is still a very grey area with in Polish law. In southern Poland TB has been recognised in European bison, wild boar and deer.



Spain

Deer in Spain are farmed for other reasons than for venison or breeding animals. The law in Spain does not allow blocks of land less than 1000ha to be fenced in as "hunting estates". There is estimated to be 35,000,000 ha of hunting estate. Spread over some 30,000 estates of which 3000 would be for big game. This land tends to very unproductive and unsuitable for other livestock, stocking rates are low with maybe only 0.2-0.6 deer/ha.

With the popularity of hunting in the 80's into the 90's the hunting estates started to breed wild boar and then red deer, fallow and mouflon within small areas (40-500ha) within the hunting estate. The animals within these small farm areas were technically farmed, albeit extensively to begin with. This led to a large surplus of female animals which allowed the estates to sometimes double their hunting quota making the estates and the small farm viable.

Animals cannot by law be hunted within the farmed fences. They can though be slaughtered on site. Most animals whether hunted or slaughtered are bought by "specialised butchers" (Game dealers). Prices range from 0.8-2.4 euro's/kg. Nearly 90% of carcasses are exported.

It is very rare for farms to breed animals purely for venison. Most are still supplying hunting estates. As deer are not recognised as traditional livestock the deer farms still have to operate under the hunting laws. This is made more complicated with Spain being divided up into 17 different areas with 17 different hunting laws.



Switzerland

In 2013 there were about 305 farms with 11,000 animals, not including parks and zoos.

The Swiss association has approximately 220 members and the average size of farm is 3.5ha with the largest farm covering 22ha. The majority of farms farm fallow deer rather than red deer.

Deer are treated in Switzerland on a par with other livestock, anyone wanting to farm deer needs to attend special training to gain permission to farm deer. The total consumption of venison in Switzerland is 5,550 tons per year of which two thirds are imported. On farm slaughter within 3 days is allowed after an inspection by a vet, all animals from deer farms are subject to meat inspection as with all other livestock. In Switzerland cattle are thought to have been infected with TB by wild deer during summer grazing in the mountains. No farmed deer have been found to be infected. There is a high population of badgers (dachs) and perhaps these could be a factor.

Cinnamon Venison

Greece has had a fair amount of news coverage of late; not all of it positive. But here, to remind you of the good things of Greece, is a sumptuous dish, given to me by food writer Rosemary Barron as a Greek recipe for lamb (Arni kanellas). I loved it and thought it would work really well with venison. It does.

I never used to be a great fan of cinnamon except with fruit, but it works exceptionally well here, and aubergines are a perfect accompaniment to venison, giving that luscious feel to the meat. The optional garnish is worth doing; it makes the end result gloriously complex, just like Greek vs EU politics.

SERVES 10-12

3 VERY LARGE AUBERGINES

1 tbsp SEA SALT

75G/3OZ SEEDLESS RAISINS

75ML/5 tbsp RED WINE VINEGAR

1.6KG (3½ LB) DICED HAUNCH, OR SHOULDER IF YOUNG

APPROX 120ML/4 FL OZ OLIVE OIL, FOR FRYING

2 LARGE ONIONS, THINLY SLICED

2 LARGE CLOVES GARLIC, FINELY CHOPPED OR CRUSHED

1KG/2¼ LB (I.E. 2½ TINS) CHOPPED TOMATOES & JUICE

1 tbsp HONEY

½ tbsp GROUND CORIANDER

1-1½ tbsp GROUND CINNAMON



GARNISH

4 tbsp CHOPPED PARSLEY

2 tbsp CHOPPED MINT

2 tbsp CHOPPED CAPERS

Heat the oven to 180°C (350°F/Gas 4). You may find it easier to cook this in two dishes if your largest casserole is not big enough. The aubergines make it quite bulky. Remove the aubergine stalks and cut into 4cm/1½ in cubes. Mix with the salt and leave them to drain for half an hour. Add the raisins to the vinegar in a bowl and leave to steep as well. By the time you have fried everything else, half an hour will have passed.

Dry the venison chunks if they have been defrosted or vacuum packed. I use a clean tea towel or large clean dishcloth for this, as paper towel sticks to the meat and in any case it's not good for the environment. (Rinse the teatowel in cold water before putting it in the washing machine.) Heat some of the oil in your largest heavy pan until very hot, then brown the venison all over, in batches, making sure it isn't crowded so it browns quickly. Then remove the chunks, draining off any oil using a slotted spoon and transfer them to a very large casserole dish.

Reduce the heat to low and add the onion, stirring gently for about 10 minutes until it is soft and transparent. Add the garlic and cook for another minute or so, then add these to the casserole.

Dry the aubergine chunks by squeezing them in another clean tea towel. Rinse out the frying pan, set it over a medium heat, and add more of the olive oil. Fry the aubergine in batches and add them to the casserole when nicely browned on both sides.

Add the tomatoes and their juices, the honey, coriander, 1 tablespoon of the cinnamon, and the raisins in their vinegar. Season with pepper but not salt at this stage as the aubergines are salty. Add a cup or two of water, cover, and heat it gently until simmering. Then cook in the oven for an hour. Give it a stir occasionally in case it sticks to the bottom.

After an hour, reduce the heat to 160°C (325°F/Gas 3). There should be enough sauce to remain a little runny at this stage; if it is a bit dry and inclined to stick, add a splash of water. Season the sauce with salt and pepper, and more cinnamon if you prefer - I usually add another half tablespoon. Bake for a further 30-40 minutes or until tender, which could mean another hour if the venison is from an older animal.

Chop the parsley, mint, and capers together. Serve the venison on a large warmed serving dish, piled high with the herbs/capers sprinkled on top. The dish is not meant to be particularly runny, but you can always stir in more water if you like. Serve it with rice, or with orzo pasta. In both cases don't overcook it and stir in a small amount of olive oil with some fresh herbs and ground black pepper just before serving. Or, even better, finely dice a courgette into 1cm (½in) pieces and stir-fry them in very hot butter, and mix this in.

Nichola Fletcher calls herself a venison ambassador; having spent the last forty years promoting it. She has written three books on the subject, as well as including venison in many of her other publications. Her latest book is reviewed elsewhere in the magazine. She gives workshops on preparing as well as cooking venison, and advises businesses wishing to sell their own. In 2014 she was awarded an MBE for services to the venison industry. 01337 828369 www.nicholafletcher.com

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facebook



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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The first BDFPA Training Course in deer handling

On Monday 31st of August and Tuesday the 1st of September Julian Stoyel led the first BDFPA training course in the handling of deer. Julian is, of course, the deer keeper at Houghton Hall near Kings Lynn in Norfolk and he has a brilliant system for handling deer of so many species as well as the occasional antelope such as blackbuck. Julian was assisted by BDFPA vice chair, Dan DeBaerdemaecker, the deer keeper at Woburn, and BDFPA chair, John Fletcher.

We have talked about running similar courses for some time but it was Julian who grabbed the notion and got us moving. With only about ten days' notice Claire rushed out e-mails to all members and we were immediately oversubscribed with would be trainees. Given the limitations on space within the yards we limited numbers to ten on day one and another ten on day two. Everyone was told to bring packed lunches and suitable clothing and off we went. Everyone understood that this was something of a trial run with us all learning more of how we could run the course differently next time but nevertheless it was generally agreed to have been a great success.

Each day followed the same pattern starting with a discussion over powerpoints and videos illustrating different handling systems. This was held in the magnificent stable block at Houghton which contains an education centre where we could have coffee and biscuits. On both days there were deer farmers who were having some problems in handling deer on their farms and we were able to discuss how they might lay out their handling yards so as to be able to improve things.

We all then moved off to the handling area at the other side of the park where Julian has constructed a viewing platform. On this most delegates stood and on day one endured continuous heavy rain with not one word of complaint. We split into different groups so that everyone could experience moving deer into the yards down the raceway from the deer paddocks and then handling the deer through the different systems to put ear tags in calves, administer copper boluses, treat with anthelmintics, and then put adult stags into the hydraulic crush and saw off their antlers. Dan took some groups and Julian others and on day two when the sun shone we also loaded stags into a truck and removed wire from a stag's antlers.

We are very keen to repeat these days and we'll be discussing how we can improve things for next time but so far so very good.





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THE VENISON BIBLE BY NICHOLA FLETCHER

112 PAGES, PAPERBACK, £4.99
BIRLINN LIMITED BOOKS, 2013 ISBN 9781780272825

You would not have thought it possible to write three books about venison cookery, but by publishing *The Venison Bible* this is what Nichola Fletcher has just done. Her first (*Venison, The Monarch of the Table*) was written in 1983, but those who already have her major 2007 work *Nichola Fletcher's Ultimate Venison Cookery* may wonder why another book is necessary. But of course there are always lovely new recipes to try, many of these being ones she has cooked at high speed for her demonstrations and workshops in the last few years. However, this one is also aimed at people who are tempted to try venison but don't perhaps want to invest in such a large book.

Selling at only £4.99, this little gem is intended to be bought for impromptu gifts and stocking fillers, but above all as a promotional tool for people selling their own venison. The trade buyer's price makes it realistic enough to use as a promotional giveaway or incentive, or as prizes. As a lifelong ambassador of venison, Nichola doesn't like to think that anyone could have an excuse not to cook venison successfully. "Buy lots and give them away!" she says.

In 112 pages, the book covers all the basic ways of cooking venison and answers the most common questions about frying, roasting, slow cooking and even how to make the tastiest mince in the world. A very useful section covers the different types of sauces to complement venison, with a few good recipes for vegetables to go with it and there is an interesting page of flavour pairings which is good for people who like to make up their own sauces.

The book is illustrated throughout with nicely quirky drawings by Bob Dewar.



The Venison Bible is part of a series of books on iconic ingredients. It is an A-Format Paperback, ISBN 9781780272825, RRP £4.99. Published by Birlinn Limited, West Newington House, Edinburgh EH9 1QS. Individual orders can be placed through their website www.birlinn.co.uk For trade orders, contact Vikki Reilly on VikkiR@birlinn.co.uk or for signed copies, contact Nichola www.nicholafletcher.com

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AT TORNADO, WE HAVE ALWAYS RECOGNISED HOW IMPORTANT HERITAGE AND BLOODLINE ARE TO OUR DEER FARMER CUSTOMERS, AND WE UNDERSTAND THE IMPORTANCE OF A STRONG PEDIGREE – AFTER ALL, WE HAVE ONE OF OUR OWN...

*f*or more than 30 years, Tornado has manufactured the highest quality and most widely trusted deer fencing in Europe, so we've picked up a thing or two about what really matters when selecting a deer fence.

The key consideration is that your fencing must provide adequate protection for your land or animals. If your investment in fencing does not provide sufficient protection for the investment in your deer, you could be facing huge costs and inconvenience for loss or damage to stock. We also understand how much a strong pedigree is worth, how long it takes to establish, and how important it is to protect. Particularly when bloodlines have been built over many years – if not generations – the last thing you want is a poor quality fence that can jeopardise all of your investment and hard work.

Tornado has a strong presence in the European deer fencing market, and has been involved in the development of specifications to cater for the needs of deer farmers in every conceivable situation. For this reason, we have not only developed the trusted deer fencing to keep your animals safely contained, but we have also made sure that our fencing keeps unwanted predators on the outside (including lynx, wolves and even the odd bear).

What we have learnt over our years in the industry is that – quite simply – quality matters. The deer farmers with whom we have worked to develop our products value the peace of mind provided by high quality fencing far more highly than the nominal savings that can be made by settling for less...and that's not to mention the cost savings in labour, maintenance and stock replacement that a high quality, purpose-built deer fence provides.

We know how precious time is for deer farmers, so we ensure that our products provide the required practicality as well as the quality. As Nick Gilmour, of John Gilmour & Partners in Leven, Fife explains, regarding installation:

"...the Titan net itself is very easy to work with; it's much stiffer than hinge knot fencing, so I can put it up on my own."

Considering the initial costs required to properly fence a deer farm, long-lasting fencing is a must. The perimeter fence must be robust enough to prevent deer from escaping and to prevent unwanted intrusions from people or other animals. The perimeter fence should be heavily galvanised to BS EN 10244 Class A; an ideal specification would be a 17 line wire fence of 194cm in height, with continuous verticals wires – spaced at 15cm intervals – for maximum strength and rigidity.

For deer farms subject to rabbit problems, it is highly recommended to install a rabbit net around the perimeter from the outset, to prevent competition for grazing. Hexagonal rabbit netting can be attached to the perimeter fence and should be buried, bent flat, pegged down and backfilled.

Specifications for internal fencing – for dividing grazing plots – will vary from farm to farm depending on deer density and the likely resulting pressure on the fences. However, generally speaking, the height can be reduced to 190cm with 13 line wires, and horizontal wire spacing can be reduced 22cm.

Most deer farms will also have a designated raceway for corraling. A similar specification to the perimeter fence would be most suitable for the raceway, but vertical wire spacing of 8cm rather 15cm will improve resistance against the increased pressure. As an extra precaution, the addition of wooden ranch boarding at deer head-height can help prevent injury to stock when in the race.

Understanding the fencing options available will help you make the right decision to protect your farm, your pedigree and your investment. Here at Tornado, we do all we can to support you in making that decision, and we would be delighted to discuss your project with you.



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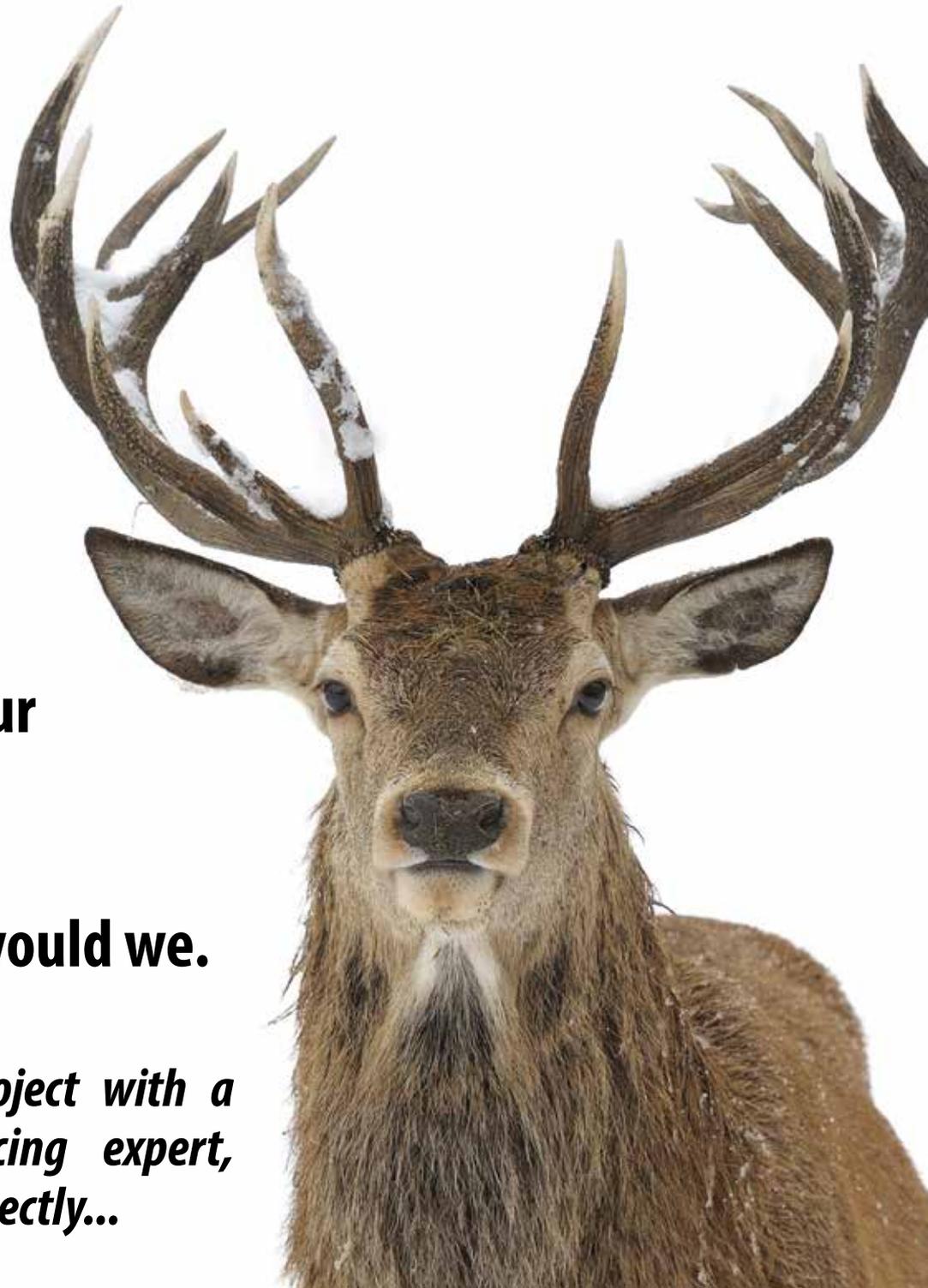
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Reviving Or Old Pastures Moving to Pastures New?

Three years ago we sold our venison business. We had started keeping deer here in 1973 on 48 acres. From then until 1996 we sold animals for breeding, mostly overseas, and were also building up a venison business. In 1996 we were placed under movement restrictions as a result of having brought deer up from a herd in the south of England that had contracted tuberculosis through purchasing two German stags. At that time there seemed no possibility of the government providing compensation for deer slaughtered as a result of TB and because we were exporting deer with full order books I decided to kill out our whole herd without compensation and resume trading as fast as possible. The only alternative

would have been endless skin tests at such a severe level of interpretation that I don't believe we would ever have got a clear test. So over two sad days we killed them all and had them all rigorously autopsied. There was no TB.

So in 1996 we had no deer for six months and took the opportunity to plough the whole farm and reseed it. The new grass was wonderful and the new deer herd thrived. Gradually, despite our taking trade stands in Italy, Portugal, Tokyo and especially several times in France, our sales began to dry up. Until that time we had sold our live deer to Japan, Thailand, Taiwan and to the US, as well as to almost every country in Europe but inevitably it had to stop, and in any case venison had always been our objective.

We found that to employ a full time butcher and the two people to pack the venison for mail order we needed to kill at least 500 deer a year and on our acreage - even though now increased to 80 – that was very demanding of our pastures. We reckoned to buy about half of these animals as calves and finish them the next summer and buy the rest as yearlings. We were constantly overstocked even buying in all our forage.

Light appeared at the end of the tunnel when, in April 2012, Vikki Banks, who had been managing the venison business since 2009, bought the venison selling operation and established it as Seriously Good Venison. She was soon able to purchase her venison carcasses from Bob Prentice who had built a fine new abattoir to kill deer at Downfield near Cupar just a few miles away. As a further development we sold our farmhouse to my daughter and family and built a new house in the deer paddocks.

These changes meant that Reediehill could revert to holding a herd of deer to sell breeding stock. We acquired foundation stock of about thirty hinds and three stags from the renowned Inshewan park herd near Forfar established over at least forty years by Colin Gibb. These deer had been carefully and meticulously selected by Colin from predominantly Scottish deer and had been run as a closed herd for around thirty years so had impeccable health status. The two youngest of the three stags went down to Houghton where Julian Stoyal used the best of the two and then I exchanged the third stag with Julian's in winter 2014-15. Finally I kept a handful of white red deer to produce a growing herd of white animals. So we now have two bloodlines from which we can select and sell progeny in due course.

All this meant that suddenly we found we were no longer overstocked and could make our own silage using the contracting services of our neighbour for the first time in decades in 2014. I soon began to remember the good effects of re-seeding in 1996. Now our swards were worn out and I had to do something to get them improved. Talking to Alan Sneddon, my colleague in Venison Advisory Services Ltd., and also to Julian Stoyal, the value of forage crops became clear.

For all my years here I am very ignorant of cropping and cultivation so I took some advice and hatched a scheme to try and re-seed a paddock each year. To do this I decided to take a crop of silage and then grow a crop of kale. I found that I could do this by direct drilling the kale seed immediately after removing the silage if I sprayed off the grass with glyphosate which is deemed to be more environmentally friendly than ploughing anyway.

The idea was good but took no account of a project I had become involved in to collect embryos from some wild cattle. We had to keep seven cattle in isolation from the deer and the only place to do that was the silage paddock. I didn't imagine so few cattle could do much damage to the pasture but by the time we moved them out in February, and later when we put on some fertiliser, the grass was looking thin. Add to this the coldest, windiest spring for decades and we ended up with a small late crop of silage. However to my fascinated amazement I found that we could spray the glyphosate before we cut the silage and so gain a week. (In fact Alan explained that in New Zealand they do this regularly and call it chemical topping).

Once the silage was cut and baled the grass underneath stayed nicely brown and in went the kale seed the next day. Because we had been late moving the cattle off the paddock our adviser from Limagrain recommended we use a rape/kale hybrid called Interval. This will give lower yields than kale but even so, according to Limagrain, should be able to achieve 3.5 – 4 tonnes/hectare Dry Matter of 65% digestibility at up to 20% crude protein and 10 – 11 megajoules metabolisable energy/kg. At the time of writing it looks great and I am excited by the prospect of having a new crop to provide winter feeding but especially by being able to then reseed with a much more productive ley in the spring. Not sure what that will be yet though.....



Carcase Classification

EXTERNAL FAT SCALE



1

No trace of fat, muscles dark.
Dry look to surface.



2

No evidence of fat on rump or
flanks. Slight fat lining to body
cavity behind kidneys.



3

Slight "whitewash" appearance
to rump. Kidneys half-enclosed
by fat.



4

Definite covering of fat over rump
and flank. Kidneys enclosed
by fat.



5

Heavy covering of fat over rump
and flank. Kidneys hardly visible
and heavy fat deposits in the
body cavity.

Guide

CONFORMATION



E

A "U" enhanced in all directions. Expected Smithfield winner.



U

Well filled saddle, no projections of spine. Haunches well muscled and rounded. Animal wedge shaped thickening towards the rear.



R

Slight projection of spine can be felt along back. Haunches flat not rounded. Neck and shoulders as heavy as rear end.



O

Definite ridge can be felt along back. Haunches hollow. Front tends to look heavier and thicker than the rear end.



P

Altogether skiny and underfinished with ribs and pin bones protruding.

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Bartholemu (2011): 47 points
Poseidon (2011): 50 points

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