



Epping Forest

Registered Charity

Deer Management and Proposed Strategy

Background and overview

In common with land managers across England, the City of London Corporation's Epping Forest Charitable Trust recognises its responsibility to manage wild fallow deer populations to protect valued habitats designated as Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), to avoid economic damage to crops and trees and to minimise deer/vehicle collisions.

In the absence of natural predators the wild fallow deer populations of southwest Essex and Epping Forest are

thriving. The Deer Initiative calculates that wild deer numbers may have doubled in England between 1999 and 2017 and this breeding success is very apparent in Essex.

Deer management review

The Epping Forest Act recognises that the deer are an "Ornament of the Forest to be preserved" but without effective deer management, the overall health of wild deer will suffer and there will be a detrimental effect on the corresponding health of the Forest and Buffer Lands.

Following a public tender process, environmental consultants The Deer Initiative Ltd were appointed to comprehensively review the current 1996 Deer Management Strategy for Epping Forest and adjoining Buffer Land.

The impact of increased deer numbers on the environment

At low population levels grazing by Fallow deer can have beneficial effects on the environment as part of a hierarchy of grazing animals, including cattle, with different styles of grazing and browsing. In small groups (relative

to the scale of the landscape) deer can help to create shorter vegetation heights as part of a mosaic of open habitats which can benefit insects that need the warmth and open ground. The groups need to be small and itinerant to prevent over-grazing and to allow recovery of vegetation and new growth.

However, when deer numbers are high, as they currently are in the Forest, browsing by deer can remove a great deal of the natural variety that makes the Forest internationally important as a SSSI and SAC. In the spring and summer deer can eat large numbers of nectar-rich plants like primroses that provide a vital food source for many insects, which in turn play an important part in the diet of resident and migrant songbirds.

Trampling pressure can also result in the loss of young tree seedlings, reducing the regeneration of the Forest and removing vital understorey trees and shrubs like crab apple and hawthorn which provide nests and shelter, as well as autumn seeds and fruits for birds and small mammals such as nightingales, warblers, blackbirds and thrushes.

Heavy browsing from higher deer populations creates greater competition for food sources which can lead to malnourishment resulting in a higher incidence of death due to exposure in winter. When their preferred food sources become more scarce deer will increasingly strip bark from trees and eat back the spreading regrowth from the bases of the Forest's famous beech coppice and pollards; regeneration of which is vital for the long-term survival of these ancient trees.

The impact of increased deer numbers on roads

The large numbers of deer in and around the urban areas of the south and south east of England are also contributing to over half the annual toll of road traffic accidents involving deer in the UK.

A number of these accidents sadly involve not only the inevitable fatality of the deer but in some case of the drivers or passengers of the vehicles. Working with local highways authorities the Charity has introduced 22 miles of speed restrictions, temporary signage and verge management around the

Forest to improve public safety and deer welfare. More needs to be done to reduce collision numbers through further speed reductions and new signage schemes aimed at increasing awareness of potential problems.

Methods of deer management

As the review highlights, there are currently limited options to manage wild deer in the absence of natural predators other than the use of legal, humane control methods.

Contraception

There are currently no contraceptives licenced for use on free-living deer in the UK. Oral contraceptives cannot be administered effectively and safely in a wild herd. Other animals would pick on leftover deer food containing the contraceptive and would be adversely affected and there would also be an adverse impact on the habitat from the droppings. It would not be possible to feed the females in isolation and so there would be a hormonal impact on the male deer. Non hormonal immuno-contraceptives that are administered through an injection can be used on captive animals such as in zoos, however, wild deer cannot be rounded up without

severe stress or injury to the animals. It would also not be possible to administer the contraceptive with a dart as it would be impossible to identify single deer so that only one dose is safely administered.

Translocation

The great majority of free-living deer are usually shy of human contact and especially of any attempts to catch them or handle them. Catching and darting wild deer is stressful, injury and casualty rates are regrettably high. There are very rare opportunities to supply deer parks given that deer populations of all species are increasing nationally.

Due to these constraints there is currently no viable alternative to control populations of wild deer in Epping Forest other than humane culling. This is widely recognised by responsible and informed landowners and deer parks. The charity will continue to take regular veterinary advice about any advances in technology that might offer a viable alternative.

Methodology

The Deer Management Strategy proposes a ten-year plan, based on annual deer population counts, for humane culling of deer to maintain or reduce the current population levels progressively to a sustainable level.

Census work and grazing impact assessments will set each season's population reduction. This will be done annually and in collaboration with neighbouring landowners and tenants.

The charity is committed to making this monitoring information publicly available each year. The impact of gradual reduction of numbers will be carefully assessed to ensure there is clear benefit to the environment and to the welfare of the deer.

The reduction in numbers will be undertaken by City of London staff trained to the highest standards as recommended by the British Deer Society.

In addition, The Epping Forest and Commons Committee including the Verderers will work with authorised local interested organisations to collectively manage additional

projects and fundraising initiatives with agreed purposes to raise awareness and education about the deer in Epping Forest.