

# THE DANE VALLEY WOODLANDS

## RED DEER IN THE PEAK DISTRICT

Red Deer are a valued part of the wildlife of the Peak District. Everyone loves to see them particularly in the summer when the calves become more visible, and again in the autumn in the rutting season when dominant males ('stags') claim groups of females ('hinds') and roar to advertise their presence to other stags. Whilst they are a native species, the Peak District populations are relatively new arrivals being largely the result of releases and escapes from deer parks during the 20th century. It is likely that prior to this time the Peak District had been deer-free for several hundred years. With the absence of wolves in Great Britain, red deer are without a natural predator with the exception of humans, and

they are commoner now than at any time in the last 1000 years.

Deer are important in the management of Peak District habitats, controlling tree and scrub growth on the open heather moorlands and maintaining glades in woodlands. However in large numbers they can also cause significant damage particularly in woodlands where they can be responsible for a poorly developed shrub layer, a lack of tree regeneration and damage to the ground flora. Nationally overgrazing/browsing by deer is becoming an increasing problem for woodland conservation across the country (State of Nature, 2013).

Red deer hinds have a calf every year (and up to 10-12 over a natural lifespan), which can lead to exponential population growth if not controlled in some way. Throughout the country deer management takes place with the aim of maintaining sustainable populations. Co-ordinated delivery of deer management is widely advocated and practiced as the best way of ensuring the long-term welfare of deer populations and managing their environmental impacts nationally.

For more information see:

[http://www.bds.org.uk/why\\_manage\\_deer.html](http://www.bds.org.uk/why_manage_deer.html)

[http://www.thedeerinitiative.co.uk/about\\_wild\\_deer/](http://www.thedeerinitiative.co.uk/about_wild_deer/)

<http://www.forestry.gov.uk/forestry/Reddeer>

- Hind shooting season
- Stag shooting season
- Calving time
- Mating time (the 'rut')
- The best time to carry out deer counts



Working in partnership with



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## DEER AND WOODLANDS IN THE DANE VALLEY

- A partnership of the National Park Authority, Forestry Commission, Deer Initiative and Natural England are encouraging the landowners to adopt a more co-ordinated approach to existing deer management with the aim of increasing the health of the woodlands.
- Deer management in the valley has gone on for many years by landowners and other owners of shooting rights, who have the legal right to take deer in season.
- Many landowners have existing arrangements with stalkers so more than 40 people are involved in deer stalking in some way in the valley. Tallies suggest that over 60 animals were taken in the core area in the 2012/13 season.
- The woodlands of the Dane Valley are of national conservation importance
- Condition assessments confirm that many of the woodlands are in poor condition with little tree regeneration, in part due to deer grazing/browsing.
- The Dane Valley Woodland Project has worked with landowners to secure positive management in the majority of woodlands, with deer taken into consideration.
- Population counts in 2012 and 2013 suggest that the early spring population in the core area of the valley is in excess of 110 deer, the majority being females. By July this population would have grown to around 180 animals. This is an underestimate of the total landscape scale population as red deer are known to range over large areas.
- National expert advice and modelling suggests that in order to achieve significant benefits in the woods, approximately 76 deer out of 180 would need to be taken in year 1 (10-15 more deer than we believe are being taken at the moment), reducing thereafter to approximately 40 by year 5. This target would be reassessed regularly in response to monitoring of woodland condition and population counts.
- As part of the process of engaging with landowners and stalkers we are also encouraging a more responsible attitude to deer stalking encouraging stalkers to take appropriate qualifications and adopt nationally recognised Best Practice Guidance
- In addition to the benefits to the woodlands, these proposals would improve the welfare of the deer population with less deer taken in the long term and an improved population structure.