

The Rt Hon George Eustice MP Secretary of State
Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
Seacole Building
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

4 May 2020

Dear Secretary of State,

Further to my letter to you of the 21st April, I am writing to see if immediate consideration could be given to the lifting of restrictions on the critical management of the UK Deer population.

We fully support the government's COVID-19 position and guidance and are advising our deer stalker members that they should only be culling deer if it is absolutely essential to protect food crops. Consequently, the majority of the UK wild deer herd is not currently being controlled.

The UK deer population is estimated to be more than two million, which if left unmanaged, has the potential to grow by approximately 15 – 30% annually. An increase in deer population will potentially adversely affect road safety conditions, it is estimated that up to 74,000 road traffic accidents per year are caused by deer. Although, damage to agriculture tends to be significant only in localised areas, damage to forestry and native flora/fauna is widespread and considerable. If culling of the UK deer herd does not recommence shortly then much of the good work in reducing the impacts of deer on our countryside will be lost.

Many of our 155,000 members are active deer stalkers and most deer population management is carried out by people who shoot deer recreationally. Within the UK there are an estimated 105,000 deer stalkers, all of whom are vetted by the Police as Firearms Certificate holders and the majority of whom have undertaken industry standard training to ensure that they are both safe and competent.

We have prepared COVID-19 guidance for deer stalkers in anticipation of lockdown restrictions being lifted (attached). Deer stalking is usually undertaken as a solo pursuit so it is easy to maintain all social distancing guidelines. The main hurdle that most people will have is to travel to their stalking grounds and they have been reluctant to do this under current government guidance and therefore falling foul of the law which could jeopardise their firearms ownership.

We would therefore welcome your recognition that deer management is an important role within the countryside and should be allowed under any easing of current COVID-19 restrictions. We look forward to working with Defra on this issue.

Yours sincerely,



Ian Bell
Chief Executive

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Guidance for Deer Stalking

Introduction:

Deer stalking is generally undertaken by no more than two people. For many, deer stalking is a solitary activity and can be undertaken without coming into contact with others. Solo stalking will be able to continue as normal once lockdown is lifted. Accompanied deer stalking, in which a client is joined by a guide (usually a professional stalker or ghillie), poses a different set of challenges for the maintenance of social distancing measures. Accompanied stalking would usually encompass both client and guide stalking within two metres of one another. However, it is our view that accompanied stalking can continue to take place provided the following guidelines are adhered to.

Guidelines:

- 1. Transportation:** Lift sharing to and from the hill, woodland or farmland should be avoided unless from the same household.
- 2. Local stalking only:** deer stalkers must follow current Government guidance on travel for the benefit of recreational activity.
- 3. Transportation:** Where possible, the stalking ground should be accessed on foot. Where a vehicle is required to access the stalking ground, individuals should sit as far apart as possible within the vehicle. The use of face covering should be considered.
- 4. Stalking equipment including an 'Estate Rifle':** no sharing of equipment or any other items. If an 'Estate Rifle' is used, then this must be cleaned and disinfected between uses and carried solely by the user.
- 5. The Stalk:** The client and guide should walk or crawl one behind the other in the stalk to reduce the visual profile. It is possible to do this while maintaining two metres separation between client and guide.
- 6. The Gralloch:** The gralloch should be undertaken by one person only to ensure two metres
- 7. separation is maintained.**
- 7. The Recovery:** Where a vehicle is required to recover the beast, it is advised that individuals sit as far apart in the vehicle as possible. Where possible, the guide should drive the vehicle containing the beast and equipment while the client walks alongside.
- 8. Hygiene:** Both client and guide are advised to wear gloves and face masks during the stalk in the usual way. This will protect contamination of the hands and face. Hand sanitizer should be used once gloves are removed on completion of the stalk.
- 9. Larder:** Ideally only one person in the larder at a time and all surfaces and equipment cleaned and disinfected between uses and users.
- 10. Carcasses:** As many game dealers may still not be taking carcasses make sure that you have organised the disposal of any shot deer before you go stalking. If only shooting small quantities, you may be processing them yourself and supplying direct to friends and family. In which case normal game meat hygiene protocols will apply. If planning to shoot large quantities, then make sure that you have a suitable market for the carcasses.
- 11. COVID-19: Anyone displaying symptoms of COVID19, or who shares a household with any individual displaying symptoms, should not go stalking and should continue to follow Government advice on isolation.**