



## Deer Management - Frequently Asked Questions for Landowners

Our FAQs are designed for landowners and shooters concerned with deer stalking. Information regarding other forms and types of shooting such as pest species and game birds can be found at The British Association of Shooting and Conservation [www.basc.org.uk](http://www.basc.org.uk)

### How do I know that deer browsing is a problem? I only see a few deer passing through occasionally.

Deer are elusive creatures, so the numbers seen are only a fraction of those present in the landscape. If you have crops you may be able to see the deer browsing damage easily and to estimate the value of lost crop. Otherwise the best indicator is the impact on nearby woodlands, where indicators of deer pressure are very clear once you know how to look for them. As a rule of thumb, a woodland with no trees under 1m high, or bramble that is less than 0.5m high shows that there is significant deer pressure on the landscape. The most effective measure is a regular deer impact survey, using standard observation techniques and a recording template. For information on how to complete a deer impact survey please follow this link <http://www.thedeerinitiative.co.uk/monitoring/activity-and-impact.php> or contact the High Weald AONB Partnership.

### How do I know if a deer stalker is safe and qualified?

It is not a legal requirement in the UK for a person who stalks deer to have any formal qualifications. Most police firearms departments stipulate that a Deer Stalking Certificate Level 1 (DSC1) must be completed prior to 'deer as a quarry' being added to the information on their firearms certificate. The DSC1 is a knowledge-based qualification that shows that an individual has passed examinations regarding firearms use and safety, deer knowledge, food hygiene, and the law relating to firearms and deer. Asking your deer stalker if they have a DSC1 or asking for a copy of their certificate is a great start. Many older generation deer stalkers may have started stalking prior to the DSC1 being a police stipulation. It is then up to you to judge whether the person is of sound mind, character and knowledge. It could be a good idea to ask for a reference. It may be the case that your deer stalker took a qualification in another country. In countries such as Denmark, Slovakia or Hungary, hunters go through very strict and lengthy processes prior to getting their licence. If your deer stalker is originally from a different country than the UK then ask to see a copy of their qualifications. For more information regarding Deer Stalking qualifications please follow this link <https://www.dmq.org.uk/dsc1/>

## **What are the arrangements for public safety when deer stalking is in progress?**

A qualified, insured deer stalker is responsible for ensuring that every shot is safe. This includes stopping stalking when members of the general public appear. Whilst the landowner needs to communicate the presence of invited guests on the land to the deer stalker, the landowner is not responsible for keeping uninvited members of the public away from the area being stalked. If it helps, signage indicating the presence of deer management for ecological purposes can be installed, and examples of good practice are available from the High Weald AONB Partnership.

## **Should I charge money for the deer stalking permission on my land?**

This is a complex question to answer and should be considered on a case by case basis. Any financial arrangements should be secondary to the deer and land management objectives. Assuming that the landowner needs to keep the deer numbers at a level where the impact on the environment is low to moderate, this becomes the overarching objective in the deer stalking agreement. Depending on the numbers of deer to be culled and the needs of the stalker, there is a choice of financial possibilities. For example, recreational stalking or client based stalking could be sold for a fee. If your primary goal is to control numbers then this becomes a service to the landowner and some recognition of the costs of providing this service (time, insurance, travel, ammunition) is needed. The financial exchange can range from deer stalker rent in the form of a small supply of venison through to a commercial letting of stalking. Letting the deer stalking or shooting rights is usually associated with large acreages of land although this is dependent on how productive the land is for deer stalking. Regardless of this, deer stalking is a time-consuming pastime with a costly outlay that can only really be recouped if run as a commercial enterprise. We are happy to discuss this question further on a case basis.

## **Do deer stalkers come with references?**

Deer stalkers do not necessarily come with references although you do have the right to ask for a character reference, similar to that in a reference for a job interview. The reference doesn't necessarily need to come from another landowner where the deer stalker holds the deer stalking agreement. It could come from another upstanding member of the community or deer stalking mentor.

## **How do I know my land is secure if I let people on it whenever they please?**

Most deer stalkers see themselves as stewards of the land. They value their stalking agreements and because of this, they are respectful and conscientious. Some deer stalkers are also budding naturalists and good at spotting things that look out of place. Deer stalkers are usually around in the early hours of the morning and late into the evening. Having a good relationship with your deer stalker pays dividends and they will most definitely take it upon themselves to inform you of any positive observations or misgivings. For example, a mindful deer stalker will let you know when a fence might be down due to a fallen tree or what rare bird species they may have seen whilst out stalking on your land. They may also inform you of suspicious looking vehicles they have seen parked in strange places around or on your land.

## **I feel like having more people on my land will be a disturbance and it will be noisy with guns going off all the time?**

Deer stalkers tend to be elusive as they are out in early mornings and late evenings. They prefer to avoid people and get to where they are going as quietly as possible so as not to disturb deer.

If a deer stalker is successful on their outing they will only fire one or two shots. With the modern type of suppressors used on rifles, the sound dissipates quite well and is not at all distressing or disturbing. It is also an option to let the deer stalker know where they can and can't shoot. You could mark this on a property boundary map and attach it to the deer stalker agreement. This could be as simple as drawing an outline on a print from Google maps or Magic map - <https://magic.defra.gov.uk/magicmap.aspx>

## **How do I know when my deer stalker will be around?**

Communication between landowner and deer stalker is key to a successful relationship. It is important to stipulate on your deer stalker's written agreement how they must communicate with you their proposed time and location of deer stalking. When and how they should contact you is at your discretion. Text messages or a mobile messaging application such as WhatsApp are incredibly useful, easy to use and immediate methods of communication. If you have more than one deer stalker or would like to include farm managers in the communication, then messaging apps such as WhatsApp allow for group messaging. It must also be stated that communication should work both ways. For example, if there is any activity occurring over the deer stalking season that may affect stalking, such as a pheasant shoot or new livestock in a field, it is important to let the deer stalker know in advance so they can best plan their activities.

## **Will my deer stalker invite all their friends? I don't want this to be a free for all.**

A landowner has a right to know who will be on the land, so taking out others has to be in agreement with the landowner. This can be laid out in the written agreement. Some deer stalkers like to take a friend with them to help carry and load a deer carcass into a vehicle. Some deer stalkers may wish to mentor or train another person in the practical elements of deer stalking. These types of agreements are entirely up to you, the landowner, and should be part of an amicable discussion with the deer stalker. If you are letting the deer stalking with the intention of the deer stalker taking out clients then this must be discussed between you.

## **I only own a small parcel of land, is this suitable for controlling deer?**

There is no legislation preventing the controlling of deer on small parcels of land providing that the shooting activities are at least 50 feet from the centre of a road. More often than not it is good practice to erect high seats in areas of ground that are flat or small in size. This gives the deer stalker the opportunity to shoot downwards towards the earth for a safe and effective backstop. With small parcels of land, agreement with the neighbours about location of deer seats and arrangements to work together on deer management can be very productive. There are also grants available for funding deer seats through the Government's Countryside Stewardship Scheme.

## **I understand that deer have to be gralloched (gutted) once shot, what happens to all this waste?**

A competent and trained deer stalker will treat the shot deer as a food product and will follow hygiene rules when gralloching and extracting deer. They will also check for any notifiable diseases (rarely found in deer in the south of England) and report to the correct authorities if found. The gralloch or the guts of the deer can be left in the woodland, or if your land has high foot traffic from the public and dog walkers, you may wish for the deer stalker to bury the gralloch or take the gralloch away. They must then dispose of this waste according to the legal requirements. We suggest that the deer stalker leaves the gralloch in the woods covered in brash or leaves, away from public footpaths or bridleways. This waste product is of high nutritional value to other species of mammals such as red fox and badgers and if cut open and exposed will disappear in a few days. Burying gralloch in woodlands is both difficult and time-consuming and extends the time for it to break down. It must be noted that under the Water Environment (Controlled Activities)(Scotland) Regulations 2011:

- i) Gralloch should not be left within 20 metres of water-course
- ii) Blood and gralloch should not be placed or poured directly into a water-course.

## **I had someone approach me about stalking deer on my land, how do I know they are not just in it for trophy heads rather than managing deer for the benefit of the environment?**

Trophy deer stalking can be seen in two lights: both negative and positive. It is a misconception that the venison from such animals is not used. Occasionally there are individuals who wish to access land because they have seen a big buck from their neighbouring land and they would like to shoot it. There are also individuals who seek land for commercial enterprises such as guided stalks for trophy size animals. The latter requires some infrastructure and good management regime of the deer herd. It is possible to reduce deer numbers to an acceptable level whilst producing majestic looking deer. On a large estate, this may be an ideal opportunity for the landowner and deer stalker to create a profitable business that is tied with land management, venison sales and client-based guided stalks.

## **How do I know that the stalking is being effective?**

If you require deer management on your land for the primary purpose of keeping deer impact at an acceptable level, it is your responsibility to discuss this with your potential deer stalker and to review progress regularly throughout the season. Ask for the deer stalkers to keep records/ photos of what they shoot and write the aims and objectives of the deer management into the deer stalking agreement. At the end of the season, an open discussion with the deer stalker about how things progressed, results achieved, etc. will set the foundation for the deer management in the next year.

## Can I sell the deer shot by the deer stalker?

If your deer stalking agreement includes the provision of some carcasses to the landowner, the rules for produce entering the food chain will apply.

Deer can be sold as an in-fur carcass to a non-retail game dealer or an Approved Game Handling Establishment (AGHE) or in small quantities to a local pub, hotel or restaurant. The deer must be inspected at the time of gralloching by someone holding a Large Game Trained Hunter qualification. A deer stalker holding a DSC1 should have this. The carcass must be accompanied by a numbered and signed declaration from the trained person. This is attached to the hind leg of the animal. The carcass value is measured in weight and the weight is written on the declaration. If you have an onsite game chiller to store the carcasses, some non-retail game dealers will collect from your premises. If not the carcass must be delivered that day and handled as food. For further information on selling game please read *The Wild Game Guide Q&A* <https://basc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/downloads/2017/07/QA-Annex.pdf>

## Can my deer stalker supply me with venison?

In short, the answer is 'yes'. The EU food hygiene regulations do not apply to a deer stalker shooting for their own consumption and they may prepare and supply game free, or with a charge, to other people without registering as a food business. If the deer stalker prepares and sells larger quantities of game they are deemed as running a business, so EU food hygiene regulations apply and premises used need to be registered with the local authority under the registration of food businesses requirement.

For further information on selling game please read *The Wild Game Guide Q and A* <https://basc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/downloads/2017/07/QA-Annex.pdf>

## I have found a deer stalker, should we have a written agreement before stalking commences?

A written agreement is recommended as this gives you the opportunity to put in writing, how, when and where the deer stalking will take place. The written agreement can be tailored to suit your needs and the deer stalkers needs. It can provide an outline of objectives and stalking aims along with information regarding the landholding and ways in which both parties communicate. It may also state fees for the stalking rights or rights to the deer carcasses. A written agreement is a binding contract that can be reviewed at a stated date or revoked within reasonable cause. An agreement should not be used to put pressure on either party to fulfil unrealistic tasks. It is an opportunity for both the landowner and the deer stalker to outline simple methods of communication and objectives. For *Deer Stalking Licence Agreement Guidance* and a *Deer Stalking Licence Agreement Template* please visit [www.highweald.org](http://www.highweald.org).

## Contacting the High Weald AONB Partnership

Please call us 01424 723104 or email us at [info@highweald.org](mailto:info@highweald.org)