



Cairngorms, Scotland

## COMBINING ECOLOGICAL MANAGEMENT WITH SOCIO-ECONOMIC GOALS

**WHERE:** SCOTLAND, CAIRNGORMS

**AREA OF RESTORATION SITE:** 60,000 HECTARES

**HABITAT TYPES:** FLOODPLAINS (WET GRASSLAND, FEN AND CARR), SCOTS PINE FOREST, BIRCH, BOG, AND RIPARIAN WOODLAND, LAKES, SUB-ALPINE HEATHS

**PROJECT LEAD:** [CAIRNGORMS CONNECT](#)

### USE OF WILD SPECIES

In the Cairngorms, artificially high numbers of deer (Red deer *Cervus elaphus*, Roe deer *Capreolus capreolus* and Sika deer *Cervus nippon*) are having a negative impact on natural regeneration of native Caledonian pine forest, and restoration of high-altitude peat bogs. In the absence of natural predators, professional deer stalkers are employed by Cairngorms Connect to cull the deer and keep their density to below 5/km<sup>2</sup>, which is the level needed to promote broadleaf regeneration. Cairngorms Connect provides [traineeships](#) to support individuals to develop the skills needed for this role.

<sup>7</sup> Game dealers are professionals who buy, sell, and store venison

To avoid waste, venison from the deer is sold both locally and nationally. Around 85-90% of the meat goes directly to game dealers<sup>7</sup> who manage the onward sale. Venison from the restoration site is currently only a small proportion of the meat the two game dealers receive, so does not have a significant impact on their overall profit but does support this rural economy to some extent. The remaining 10-15% is sold through other channels. This includes sale of the venison at a farm shop, an RSPB nature reserve, at a local pub and via a local delivery service, for those who want to cook it themselves.

### HOW IS THE USE OF WILD SPECIES SUPPORTING THE GOALS OF THIS RESTORATION PROJECT?

In this restoration landscape, deer populations need to be carefully managed to enable recovery of damaged habitats and allow the expansion of native woodland. The project also aims to contribute to and enhance the livelihoods and wellbeing of local people through direct employment, contracting local services, and creating apprenticeships.

Deer stalking and the sale of high quality, sustainably sourced venison from the culled deer supports habitat recovery whilst also providing employment opportunities for stalkers, complimenting the income of game dealers, and contributing to profits of local butchers and other food outlets.



Venison Masterclass

### STRATEGIES TO SUPPORT SUSTAINABILITY

Male deer can be harvested all year around, but females only outside of their breeding season. Around 2,000 deer a year are culled across the whole restoration landscape. The value of the venison depends on quality, and the extent to which stalkers process the venison pre-sale but can amount to around GBP90,000 a year (e.g., an average of GBP45/ a deer when sold to game dealers). Cairngorms Connect uses proceeds from the sale to invest in the employment of professional deer stalkers, contributing back toward the ecological management of the site.

Local butchers profit from the sale of the venison harvested from the restoration site,

but venison purchased from the game dealers is mostly not identifiable as being from the restoration site, as the game dealers purchase venison from various sources which become mixed in supply chains. Profits can be higher if the butchers sell venison with the brand of the restoration site and a 'story' behind the meat. The sale of branded venison is currently being done only on a small scale, but the project hopes to expand on this.

More information about this restoration landscape can be found on their [ELSP project page](#) and on the Cairngorms Connect project site, which has [a page dedicated to the venison project](#).