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Environmental groups respond to SNH deer management report

A coalition of environmental organisations have welcomed improvements in the functioning of deer management groups while warning that a step change is needed if climate and biodiversity targets are to be met.

A report published today by Scottish Natural Heritage suggests that there has been “significant progress” in deer management planning and evidence of improvements on the ground in reducing deer densities in some areas. The report, however also noted that three out of five key Scottish biodiversity targets are “unlikely to be delivered” because of high deer densities and that there has been “insufficient progress” in protecting and restoring native woodlands.

Duncan Orr-Ewing, Chair of LINK Deer Group said: “We welcome the report’s findings that the majority of land managers are complying with the basic requirements of the Deer Code, and acknowledge the positive leadership of SNH within the constraints of a voluntary system.

“It’s also clear from the report that much more needs to be done. Across our upland landscapes in particular, high deer impacts and other grazing pressures are damaging peatlands and halting woodland regeneration and expansion. These issues are closely connected to meeting the obligations of the Scottish Government’s climate emergency and halting drastic biodiversity decline.

“We need a sense of urgency to protect and restore our woodlands and peatlands and that means tackling the destructive impact of our historical legacy of unsustainably high deer densities. We look forward to the more wide-ranging report from the independent Deer Working Group and would like to see SNH given greater powers and resources to drive forward the scale of the change required.”

The SNH study was commissioned by the Scottish Government to report specifically on the progress of deer management groups between 2016 and 2019. Among other conclusions, it states: “*Three of the five Scottish Biodiversity Strategy (SBS) Route map 2020 targets in which deer management has a role are unlikely to be delivered. The native woodland condition and restoration targets show insufficient progress and should be a priority for future focus.*”

A separate review into deer management in Scotland is expected to be delivered to the Scottish Government shortly by the independent Deer Working Group.

This statement is supported by the following members of the Scottish Environment LINK Deer Group:

- **John Muir Trust**
- **RSPB Scotland**
- **Scottish Wildlife Trust**
- **Trees for Life**