

Ashdown Area Deer Group
Request for information and invitation to deer meeting
January 2008

You are probably aware of the large number of collisions between deer and road traffic that occur on Ashdown Forest and in the surrounding area each year. As a measure of the apparently worsening situation, in the 1980s such collisions were a rare event, by 2000 Forest Rangers were being called out to deal with 100 incidents. By the end of 2006 the figure had risen steadily to a record 340; the figures for 2007 were similar, as they were for 2008. The A22 between Forest Row and Nutley is the worst stretch of road in Britain for deer/vehicle collisions (see www.deercollisions.co.uk). Fallow deer are the main cause for concern, being by far the most numerous and, by virtue of their size, causing the most serious damage in a collision.

Thus far, there have fortunately been very few human fatalities as a result of deer vehicle collisions. The reported numbers of deer vehicle collisions are only an indication of the true extent of the problem. Research indicates that more deer are hit than are reported and that, for fallow, at least as many deer are injured as are killed. Not all of the injured deer can be found and humanely dispatched. This is a significant welfare issue.

The causes of this problem are complex but a substantial rise in the deer population has certainly been a contributory factor. Since the creation of the Forest for hunting the deer have always been culled; that is part of their proper and humane management. The annual cull locally since the 1980's has not been sufficient to account for the natural tendency for numbers to increase. There has in parallel been a general increase in fallow numbers across much of the south of England possibly encouraged by a series of very mild winters and changes in land use.

Fallow are known to be difficult to manage except on a landscape scale and it is arguable that cross boundary cooperation with regard to the deer has reduced in recent times, again allowing numbers to rise. Indications are that there may be several thousand fallow within the Group's area. Very high deer numbers are probably not sustainable in terms of the health of the deer themselves or for the habitats in which they live and the number of deer vehicle collisions is likely to increase further as the deer population increases.

Following exploratory meetings in May and July 2006, the Ashdown Area Deer Group was formed with the aim of providing a forum for deer matters, and with the linked objectives of reducing deer road traffic collisions and ensuring the welfare of a healthy, local deer population. The Group comprises local landowners and representatives from the Conservators of Ashdown Forest, the British Deer Society, the Deer Initiative, East Sussex County Council, Ministry of Defence, RSPCA, and Sussex Police. In addition the Group is committed to involving any other party interested in furthering its aims and objectives. Minutes of Group meetings and findings are available on www.ashdownforest.org. The nominal area of coverage of the Group is indicated on the attached map. Essentially it comprises: the area bounded by the A264 in the north (East Grinstead to Tunbridge Wells road), the A267 in the east (Tunbridge Wells to the junction with the A272 near Hadlow Down), the A272 in the south (from near Hadlow Down to Haywards Heath) and the B2028 in the west (Haywards Heath to Turners Hill road).

So far, the Group has:

- succeeded in having additional road warning signs placed on the most accident prone stretch of the A22, including a “cricket score” of accident numbers which is updated regularly;
- launched a scheme throughout East Sussex for dealing with injured deer and removing deer carcasses, and widening the cover for injured deer, thus extending the voluntary service historically provided in the centre of the area by the Ashdown Forest rangers;

– carried out two major thermal imaging (night) surveys in and around the Forest, with up to 780 deer being seen in one night.

The Group is contacting you with a view to gathering more information on the current status of deer in the area and to invite you complete a short questionnaire on the subject. After the results are collated the intention is to hold a meeting to discuss the deer situation – most likely at the Ashdown Forest Centre.

The questionnaire is attached. Please take the time to complete as much of it as you feel able. If you have any queries, please contact the Ashdown Forest Centre on 01342 823583.

Thank you very much

Yours sincerely

Hew Prendergast
Chairman, Ashdown Area Deer Group