

# **Minutes of the first meeting of Ashdown Area Deer Group**

19 Sept 2006, Ashdown Forest Centre, Wych Cross, Forest Row, East Sussex

Present: Neil Brookes (British Deer Society, BDS), Jamie Cordery (Deer Initiative, DI; minute taker), Richard Grimwood (MoD), Jochen Langbein (Deer Initiative), Alan Morriss (Pippingford), Hew Prendergast (Conservators of Ashdown Forest), Graeme Lake (East Sussex County Council, ESCC)

## **1) Apologies**

Rodney Ash (Firearms Manager, Sussex Police), Colin Booty (RSPCA), Brian Ellis (Firearms Officer, Sussex Police), Fred Marshall (Conservators of Ashdown Forest), John Sully (Rystwood Estate Ltd, Forest Row and liaison with BASC).

[Minutes of the last meeting were approved.]

## **2) and 3) Deer Data and Identification of local landowners/Deer managers**

The current total for deer RTCs is now 210 as of the date of the meeting. The year total will almost certainly exceed last year's total, indicating a problem that continues to worsen.

Enquiries into land ownerships and deer management coverage in the area are continuing; BDS and BASC will call for information in their next regional newsletters (Oct/ Nov). DI and Fred are pursuing contacts through local knowledge and the Forestry Commission.

An example of the landowner/deer manager questionnaire used by DI was discussed as a possible model for the use of the Group. Jamie agreed to simplify the format and to include an invitation to take part in the census referred to below.

DI intend to carry out thermal imaging surveys where access permission can be obtained, probably beginning in February/March. It is hoped that a general daytime census can be coordinated across the area in March; this, together with the TI survey and other local knowledge, will begin to give a better picture of the true range and numbers of deer.

## **4) Draft press release**

A draft press release drawing attention to the existence of the Group and stating its aim and objectives was agreed for release at the point when the RTC total exceeds 215 (last years total). The press release will carry a link to the Conservator's website where more details will be found.

## **5) Options for roadside mitigation measures**

Jochen referred to his e-mail of 18/9 in which he outlined the various mitigation measures that are available. In summary his opinion is that three measures could be considered for action in the near future:

- Speed limit reduction on the A22
- Interactive/variable messaging road signs
- Verge widening

Other methods such as reflectors and sound generating devices are currently giving variable results elsewhere or are unproven and cannot be recommended at present.

Graeme outlined the difficulties of changing speed limits on trunk roads, citing the interests of road users, the cost and regional priorities for traffic measures. It was pointed out that although the Pippingford Bend stretch has the worst deer collision record in the UK it was the human injury record that had to take precedence. (By good fortune there have been very few serious human injuries due to deer in the area but this is at odds with most other parts of the country, sadly it may only be a matter of time before a more serious collision occurs.) Graeme agreed to look into the casualty and vehicle damage records for the areas and to compare the car count records from five years ago and the present. He will also speak to GOSE to investigate the possibility of erecting interactive/ variable messaging road signs on the A22.

The possibility of “match funding” from relevant organisations (e.g. animal welfare charities) might also be worth investigating. The cost and ownership difficulties of an extensive verge widening scheme was discussed; further action may depend on the ownership data generated at 2) and 3).

## **6) Underpass, fencing**

Alan and Jochen had visited a potential site for an A22 underpass south of the Pippingford Bend. Alan explained that an underpass at this site, combined with fencing, could serve to allow deer, horse riders and foot traffic to cross the road safely. He is intending to find approximate costs, either through the County Council or a suitable contractor. Jochen cited an example elsewhere of a cost of around £1 million. The general consensus was that although the underpass might quickly alleviate the deer RTC problem at that site it would still be necessary to consider the core problem of increasing deer numbers across the area as a whole.

## **7) “Task and Finish Groups”**

Jamie suggested that there were at least three main strands to the business of the Group and that each strand could be pursued in parallel, making best use of the specialist effort and time available from within the Group and outside.

The three strands identified were:

- Road traffic mitigation measures such as discussed at 5)
- Deer road traffic collisions call out scheme to deal with injured/killed deer
- Deer management to prevent ever increasing deer numbers

It was proposed that each strand would become the business of a sub-group drawn from the wider Group members (together with other assistance as appropriate) and that each sub group would report at regular whole group meetings.

Initial suggestions for sub group membership are:

- Road traffic mitigation: Jochen Langbein, ESCC, Alan Morris.
- Deer road traffic collisions: Jochen Langbein (as coordinator of deer RTC project), RSPCA, Sussex Police, Ashdown Forest Rangers, MOD, DI.
- Deer management: BDS, MOD, Forest Enterprise/Forestry Commission, Ashdown Forest Rangers, Fred Marshall, John Sully, DI, and BASC (?).

On confirmation of sub-group membership each group should, by the end of October 2006, elect a lead member, decide on relevant areas for action, prioritise these and present them to the wider group.

### **8) Conduct of Business and circulation of minutes**

It was agreed that where possible business should be conducted electronically, particularly within the sub-groups with physical meetings being called as appropriate. A physically meeting of the whole group should be called at least twice a year and as appropriate.

Minutes of the whole group meetings will be circulated among the group and published on the Conservator's web site for wider viewing. It was also agreed that participants in the May workshop should be circulated with the minutes of the first Group meeting and that their attention be drawn to the website for subsequent developments.

### **8) AOB**

Jamie agreed to contact Dorset Police for guidance on deer RTC call outs.

### **9) Date of next meeting**

Sub groups to contact members asap with a second electronic meeting in January.

Main group to meet at 1400 on Wednesday 17<sup>th</sup> Jan 2007 at the Forest Centre. Main item of business: Area deer census.