

January 2016

Q. As part of the Callander Black Grouse project to the north of the town, the National Park, I believe, has carried out twice yearly surveys of the area.

A. Surveys of Black Grouse, that have been carried out by the Park Authority are:

- Black grouse counts at known lek sites within the project area, combined with searches in case of leks moving or splitting.
- Twice yearly Herbivore Impact Assessments (HIA) in an area known as the Commonty, which is part of Braeleny Farm. HIA surveying is carried out in June before cattle graze the site during the summer months and a follow up survey is carried out after the cattle have been taken off the site in September.

Q. I am interested to know what was the aim of these surveys, what information was collected

A. The aim of the lek surveys is to track changes in the numbers of lekking black grouse as an indicator of population size in the area.

The aim of the HIA survey is to monitor the grazing/browsing impact on several habitats across the site. The site has been subdivided into five main habitat types these are described as Habitat Mosaic, Rush Pasture, Upland Birchwood, Wet Heath and Wet Woodland.

The HIA survey assess the level of ground disturbance, sward height, presence of preferentially browsed or grazed plants, level of browsing on seedlings and saplings, level of bark stripping or stem breakage, level of browsing on epicormic growth/lower shoots, level of browsing of basal shoots and the 'Woodland Structure Class' (e.g open ground, dense regeneration, mature, post-mature etc)

Q. When the surveys took place

A. Annual spring black grouse surveys have been undertaken each spring in March/April, since 2012, though not every lek site is surveyed every year. HIA surveys took place before and after cattle grazing of the Commonty annually between 2012 and 2015.

Q. What did the monitoring indicate? What conclusions were reached as to the success or otherwise of the current grazing management plan?

A. No report has been completed yet concluding the monitoring data, however, for the HIA surveys of the Commonty, the data shows a gradual trend from very high/high impacts to medium/low impacts.

Q. Have the number of black grouse increased or decreased over the last 5 year in the area of the Callander Black Grouse Project?

A. The black grouse survey data for the period 2012 to 2015 have shown an overall decline in the number of lekking males in the project area, continuing a trend that was in place prior to the project commencing. Spring 2016 will be the fifth year of monitoring with a final survey due in 2017. It remains to be seen if the birds will respond to the management measures undertaken.

Q. What is the methodology used for surveying the rush pasture and what plant species are monitored in this habitat. Similarly, I would ask the same two questions for the wet heath, as I assume the way these two habitats are monitored would be

different from that used for the woodland areas.

This area has a rich diversity of vascular plants, has any monitoring been undertaken to ensure the grazing regime is not affecting these populations?

- A. Please find attached documents which show the methodology used for the black grouse project area monitoring, that has been undertaken for the habitats within the project area. The documents attached are:
- Herbivore Impact Assessment field guide,
 - HIM blank template,
 - monitoring map
 - guidance note for completion of the monitoring field sheet.

The habitat map identified blocks of neutral/acidic wet woodland, acidic dry birch woodland, acidic dry policy woodland, wet heath, rushes (with areas of neutral grassland), rush/bracken/wet heath/herb-rich flush mosaic and bracken (locally with grasses/bluebell beneath). For all these habitats the methodology identified the impacts of the grazing on Preferentially Browsed or Grazed Plants, Sward and Ground Disturbance (see field guide for more detail).

Q. If the Black Grouse numbers continue to fall despite the measures undertaken, will this project continue after 2017?

A. We are currently in the process of reviewing the effectiveness of the Black Grouse project, exploring all outcomes which the project has achieved. These outcomes will be discussed with the individual privately owned land based businesses before any decision is taken as to support going forward.