

## Covid 19 – the senseless lockdown in the countryside, SNH and deer stalking

### Description

#### Deer Stalking

SNH has made available the following guidance for deer managers:

*"In the fight back against Covid-19 deer managers should not therefore be travelling to go st at this time is not an essential activity and undertaking stalking does carry a risk of accidents dealing with any incident will put the emergency services and NHS under further pressure."*

Further to this [ADMG](#) is recommending deer managers should:

- consider whether work such as Habitat Impact Assessments, training, or other activity, even out of doors, is essential or whether it can be postponed.
- postpone any non-essential face-to-face meetings including DMG meetings. There are only can be effectively used for small meetings such as Skype or Teams.
- avoid all non-essential travel.
- avoid any activity that might, through accident or error, place additional pressure on any services.
- check the [Covid-19 Support for Businesses, Guidance for Employees, employers and busi](#) pages for notifications of measures that could help your business.

Carcase collection from larders will be affected as processors respond to the current situation. Scottish Government through [Scotland Food and Drink](#) has said that businesses involved in remain open if possible, subject to being able to adhere to two requirements safe social dist normal health and safety requirements. We will issue further updates as information is made

Extract from Cairngorms National Park Authority website

In the corona panic, the Scottish Government and our Public Authorities have completely lost all sense of reason. It will have serious human and environmental consequences.

What the Coronavirus Health Protection Restriction Scotland Regulations ([see here](#)), passed last week by the Scottish Government without any parliamentary scrutiny, actually say is that you cannot leave where you are living unless you have a reasonable excuse. These include:

*"to travel for the purposes of work or to provide voluntary or charitable services, where it is not reasonably possible for that person to work, or to provide those services, from the place where they*

*are living”.*

While you might occasionally be able to pot a deer from your upstairs window, that would be dangerous and you cannot normally stalk from where you are living. There is therefore, contrary to SNH’s advice, NO legal restriction on deer managers travelling to go stalking as part of their work. Its important here to note that there is NO reference to “essential work” in the regulations. This has been added by government afterwards, with the UK and Scottish Government inventing definitions of what is essential on the hoof, and with every government agency in turn then coming up with a slightly different definition of what they believe “essential” is. This is bonkers.

People working outdoors in the countryside – for whatever reason – just like walkers ([see here](#)), pose almost no risk when it comes to spreading the coronavirus. It really doesn’t matter whether your work is perceived as essential (e.g farmers) or non-essential (e.g artists painting the landscape). The facts are that most stalkers work alone. Most now use ATVs to get onto to the hill and to transport deer off it. The only time they are likely to have contact with others is in the deer larders, which are part of food production and are exempt from the the list of indoor premises that have been shut as part of the lockdown. I have never been a fan of the Association of Deer Management Groups approach to managing red deer, they have like our governments in the corona crisis done too little too late, but their advice to members was responsible (just like the advice which say Mountaineering Scotland issued to hillwalkers). Yet SNH has taken it upon itself to overrule this and declare that travel to go stalking – ie driving to wherever your ATV is located – should stop. This is bonkers.

SNH’s justification for this is that the stalker might have an accident and need to call on the emergency services. The chance of this happening is miniscule and the ADMG advice on how to reduce such risks is sensible.

The position of stalking is completely different to muirburn, which the Scottish Parliament rightly banned for the duration of the crisis this week ([see here](#)). That is because we know moorland fires regularly get out of control and can tie up fire crews for days. The fire service is playing an important role at present assisting the SNH. But we cannot stop all work on the basis that someone might have an accident. I will not be surprised if the statistics soon show that accidents in people’s homes, which has long been the most common location for accidents to occur, are increasing – not least because people unable to get outside and without jobs take to drink.

The consequences of SNH’s advice for both the environment and climate change (that other emergency that was declared a year ago) are likely to be dire. We need to bring deer numbers down to enable woodland to regenerate and prevent damage to peat and other habitats, as the Deer Working Group reported at the beginning of the year ([see here for recommendations for Cairngorms National Park](#)). What SNH’s advice does is to undermine the efforts of all those landowners who have been trying to bring deer numbers down, like Wildland Ltd and the National Trust for Scotland, and excused all the estates that have far too many deer, led by the Royal Family at Balmoral ([see here](#)) from doing anything.

In issuing this crass advice, SNH have completely abandoned their statutory responsibility for controlling the number of red deer and protecting the natural environment. They need to be shamed and everyone who cares about the natural environment needs to protest. The Coronavirus Restriction Regulations are draconian enough without making the situation worse.

## **Addendum**

Since writing this post I have learned that Wild Land Ltd have furloughed 60 staff – in other words the UK Government is going to pay 80% of their salaries up to £2500 a month. I am sure many of these staff had to stop work, such as those working in the boutique hotel at Killiehuntly, but I wonder how many of these were working outside? If the number includes stalkers keeping deer numbers down out of season, the risk now is that the large population of deer on Atholl Estates will move over the watershed into Glen Feshie to take advantage of all those regenerating trees. The same is likely to happen at Mar Lodge. It looks like years of conservation effort could be undermined because somehow stalking, while quite safe, is not deemed “essential”.

## **Category**

1. Cairngorms

## **Tags**

1. CNPA
2. conservation
3. Deer
4. grouse moors
5. Scottish Government
6. scottish natural heritage

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## **Author**

nickkempe

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