



SECTION 4

MANAGEMENT – DEER LIVE CAPTURE

In medieval times, the practice of live capture of deer was widespread and the remains of enclosure traps can still be seen in several parts of Scotland. This practice was revived at Creag Meagaidh between 1986 and 1994 and continued sporadically until 1998. A passive system of live capture is still maintained and occasionally small numbers of deer are caught.

As mentioned in previous chapters one of the main management objectives at Creag Meagaidh is to encourage the regeneration of native forest through a reduction in grazing pressure. Live trapping was used in conjunction with a heavy cull to achieve this objective. The use of live traps had several advantages over culling.



Aerial View Of Capture Pens

ADVANTAGES OF LIVE CAPTURE

Costs

Once the initial cost of installing the fencing had been written off it was far cheaper to trap the deer than to reduce their numbers through stalking. There is also a major saving in man days when comparing live capture with traditional stalking.

Income

In the 1980's, there was a demand for wild deer as breeding stock on deer farms. Unfortunately, this market is presently very poor though it may revive in future.

Reduction in vegetation damage

The upland vegetation at Creag Meagaidh is very fragile and the removal of carcasses by ATV's caused scarring which takes many years to disappear.

Research

The presence of the live capture pens makes it far easier to obtain deer for tagging or other research.

Education

The presence of deer in the pens at Aberarder is very valuable during educational visits.

Selectivity

Live capture allows the selective removal of deer.

Disadvantages of live capture

Initial cost of setting up the capture pens.
Feeding costs incurred if the captured deer are not disposed of.



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HOW DID IT WORK?

The capture fields were baited with turnips and the entrance gate left open. When sufficient deer had entered the enclosure the gate would be closed and the deer would be left to settle and get used to the fences. After a while they would be gently cajoled into a high picket fenced race which led to the capture pen itself. The high wooden fence removed their peripheral vision which had a calming influence on the deer. Surprisingly, it was found that, initially at least, wild deer are easier to handle than farmed deer. This was due to the wild deer habit of freezing when alarmed making them very quiet in the capture pens. In contrast, farmed deer are familiar with their surroundings and can be far more troublesome. Any stags caught in the pen were released while hinds and calves were held until a buyer was found.

WHY DID LIVE CAPTURE STOP?

Active live trapping ended in 1998 mainly because the bottom fell out of the live deer market and it proved impossible to sell the captured deer. Also in the later years an increasing percentage of the deer caught were stags rather than the targeted hinds and calves.

The capture pens have now been dismantled but a small captive herd remains which is kept for research and educational purposes. Although stalking has been the main means of deer population control since 1998 a change in the live deer market or a continued increase in the resident stag population may lead to the re-introduction of live trapping at Creag Meagaidh.



Red Deer in the capture field

HOW SUCCESSFUL WAS THE LIVE CAPTURE PROGRAMME?

Between 1985 and 1994 four hundred and sixty-six Red Deer were captured. This represented 34% of the total hind/calf population during this period.

The total cost of the live capture programme during this period was approximately £24,000, divided equally between infrastructure costs and labour costs. The income from live capture during the same period was approximately £36,000. In comparison, the deer cull programme between 1985 and 1994 is estimated to have cost in the region of £57,000, with the bulk of this being labour costs (approx. £45,000) and the remaining £12,000 required for safety equipment, vehicle costs etc. An income of £70,000 was generated from culled venison sales.