

Quantock Deer Management and Conservation Group

www.quantockdeergroup.co.uk



To all deer count helpers, landholders and members of QDM&CG

Firstly an apology, we all know that 2020 hasn't been a straight forward year. It has set us back in finalising the results but also due to an administration change.

The 30th annual end of winter deer count took place on **Sunday 1st March 2020**. A total of 67 volunteers took part, a mixture of regular counters and some new helpers. It was a cold Sunday morning with very early scattered snow flurries in the northern hills but conditions were generally reasonable for the count. The usual 'Quantock Country' – 44 main counting blocks – plus several sub-divisions were covered.

The volunteer forms are worked through in order, looking at potential double sightings where deer have moved from one block to another. All additional information here on time of sighting, direction of travel, break-down of the group is really useful and helps with the inclusion of the sighting or duplication. Noting deer in 'another' block can help as the landscape might not always allow deer tucked in a sheltered corner to be seen.

A total of 529 red deer were counted on the day. Looking at the graph, numbers since 2014 have, with the exception of what looks to be an 'unusual year' or anomaly last year in 2019 have been over 500. Taking a look at the 'trends' helps to iron out odd spikes or dips. The break-down in the numbers shows a much higher proportion of hinds than stags, with only 50 'male' deer counted on the day, although we 'hope' the number of stags is higher as they tend to leave the main hill by the spring and can be hidden away in quieter woods. With stags easier to recognise than hinds it's the autumn rut that we hope see's notable stags return to the hill top or particular rutting stands, or younger stags continuing their development to maturity. The 'Quantock Country' is relatively small, especially given the range stags will move and the wider pressures on the 'stag' population few reach a really old age, as compared to larger areas such as Exmoor.

Once again the majority of the deer counted were in the northern area, north of the Nether Stowey to Crowcombe Road. This is a usual trend and could be to a number of factors – it's more 'open' landscape making deer more visible and easier to find and count, there really are more deer in this part of the hills, lower numbers in more wooded areas and the southern farmland area. With the count taking part on 'one' morning any coinciding events or activity on the hills may cause the deer to move to their daily resting places earlier or under the cover of darkness so going un-counted. The weather often plays a big part in early March, cold northerly winds, fog and rain may influence numbers. The count doesn't assume 'all' the deer have been counted, but by breaking the hills into areas with a co-ordinated volunteer effort it's hoped most are counted. Again the use of the graph to look at the trends helps to show what's going on with the deer population.

The Red Deer are the main focus of the annual deer count. However counters are also asked to record any other deer species – Roe, fallow, Sika or Muntjac. Of these Roe are regularly counted and with 155 counted in 2020 it is the highest number recorded in recent years. The numbers of Roe seem to fluctuate much more than the reds. They are difficult to spot, live in smaller groups and are often gone before they are spotted. One Muntjac was seen this year, no Fallow or Sika.

The count is one of the longest running deer counts in the country. With 25 years (and one lost to Foot and Mouth) it's a fantastic achievement and result of so many people interested in the deer coming together annually. It's a huge undertaking and effort to co-ordinate so a big thank you for all those involved from planning, preparation and of course to all the volunteers heading out very early, often on a cold March morning and then the number crunching ... thank you!

Matthew Peaster Chairman

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Quantock Deer Count - Summary of deer count 1st March 2020

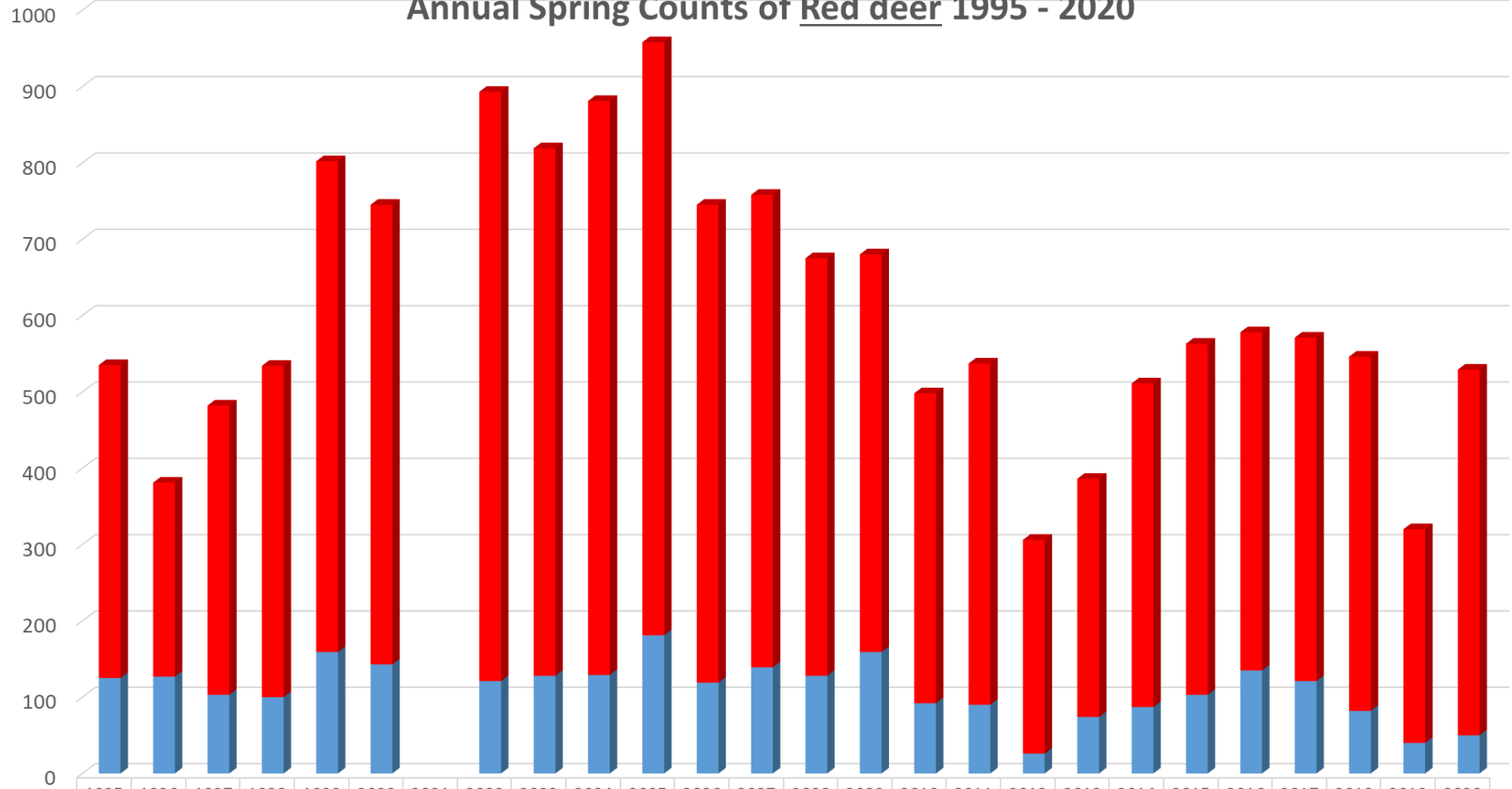
Red Deer	Hinds & Calves	Prickets	Young Stags	Older Stags (> 4 yr old)		Roe Deer	Fallow Deer	Muntjac Deer
529 :	479	20	21	9		155	0	1

Comparison of Red deer counted March 2020 with past 4-year average by region:

<u>Year 2020</u>			<u>Average 2016 – 2019</u>		
Total	Hinds & Followers	Prickets & Stags	Total	Hinds & Followers	Prickets & Stags
529	479	50	504	409	95
A: North (all count blocks lying north of the Crowcombe to Overstowey road)					
359	331	28	354	297	57
B: Central: (South of Crowcombe to Overstowey Road to Lydeard Hill, incl. Great Wood, Aisholt Common, West Bagborough & Crowcombe Heathfield)					
145	123	22	139	103	35
C: South-East (all areas south-east of Lydeard Hill – incl. Cothelstone, Broomfield to Kings Cliff.					
25	25	0	12	10	2

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Annual Spring Counts of Red deer 1995 - 2020



■ Hinds & Followers	410	254	379	434	643	602		772	691	752	777	626	619	547	521	406	447	280	312	424	460	443	450	464	280	479
■ Stags & Prickets	125	127	103	100	159	143		121	128	129	181	119	139	128	159	92	90	26	74	87	103	135	121	82	40	50

■ Stags & Prickets ■ Hinds & Followers

RED DEER : Totals by Year

Year	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Total	535	381	482	534	802	745	FMD	893	819	881	958	745	758	675	680	498	537	306	386	511	563	578	571	546	320	529