

NEWS

Durrell to bring forward ban on deer hunting on Scottish estate

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DURRELL is to end the killing of deer for sport at its Dalnacardoch Estate in Scotland earlier than originally expected, the JEP has learned.

The Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust had previously said it would stop what it called "paid deer management experiences" – where visitors pay around £700 to shoot a stag – at the end of the current hunting season in spring 2026.

Pressure groups, including Jersey-based We Love the Zoo and UK-based anti-shooting group Protect the Wild, have been calling for an immediate end to the practice, which they have described as trophy hunting.

Campaigners have also requested that a resolution be put to Durrell members at the 2025 AGM.

Responding to queries from the JEP, the trust has now confirmed that the paid practice will end in November 2025.

The last contractual booking for paid-for stalking is on 20 October, and there are 30 bookings.

"Earlier this year, we confirmed that this will be our last season of commercial stalking," a spokesperson said.



■ Durrell has been running "paid deer management experiences" at its Dalnacardoch Estate

"While the season technically runs until spring 2026,

we were already working towards ending this activity by autumn 2025, albeit we didn't have a final date

confirmed at that time.

"Our last booking is at the end of October 2025, and from November 2025, we will manage deer exclusively via our own team."

While the charity said that its "plan since taking on the lease has always been to transition away from commercial stalking, which is something that we have openly communicated", Protect the Wild's Tom Anderson said he felt the decision to bring paid deer stalking to an end in 2025 was the "direct result of sustained grassroots pressure".

Though he said it was "disappointing" that the confirmation had followed "repeated calls", he said it was a "welcome step in the right direction".

However, he said that he would like to see the trust stop what he described as a "cruel practice" right away, rather than in November.

Durrell revealed its plans for the "major rewilding project" in the Cairngorms National Park, halfway between Blair Atholl and Dalwhinnie, in 2023.

The organisation said that it had a "long-term vision" to revive the estate, with a "scientific approach that combines hands-on species management with habitat restoration while working alongside local communities and training conservationists".

Its website describes stalking as playing a "valuable role in Scotland by supporting skilled rural jobs and preserving knowledge that has shaped land management for generations".

"These skills are essential in helping us meet evolving conservation goals, such as woodland regeneration and peatland restoration," it adds.

A spokesperson for NatureScot said that deer contributed to biodiversity but "in high numbers they can have a negative impact on

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Durrell

woodlands, peatlands and other habitats".

"Sustainable deer management is vital if we are to bring populations in balance with the rest of nature and effectively tackle the twin crises of biodiversity loss and climate change," they said.

"It is up to individual landowners whether they decide to take an income from sport stalking or not."

"Dalnacardoch Estate remains an active member of the West Grampian Deer Management Group and contributes to its objectives."

"This includes woodland expansion, improving peatland condition and reducing deer densities across the area to support these objectives."

We Love the Zoo mem-

ber and former Durrell employee Joya Ghose said her personal view was that the rewilding focus should instead involve "reintroducing a predator, such as the wolf or the lynx, to the equation, rather than simply shooting deer".

"If that is not on the table, we should be looking at contraceptive options," she suggested.

The JEP has asked Durrell to confirm how many paid deer management experiences have taken place since the trust took over the estate in 2023.

A figure was not provided, but Durrell said that: "Since taking on the estate, we have reduced guest involvement in deer management, from 95% in 2022 to only 25% in 2024."

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