



## Stimulating the trade of wild venison to effectively manage deer

**Unsustainable populations of some deer species can have a detrimental effect on our woodlands. In fact, non-native deer cost the UK economy £34.9 million per year. (Shaw R, 2014)**

Deer can reduce biodiversity by eating too many native wild plants; they can stop young trees from becoming established by eating growing shoots and can damage older trees by stripping bark.

At Hatfield Forest in Essex, sustainable deer management became critical in order to maintain the biodiversity of the ancient woodland.

Although wild venison had been sold from the site to stimulate local trade, the carcasses were sold whole, unprocessed and at wholesale prices. Not only did this limit the level of income, the venison did not meet the requirements of potential customers as survey data highlighted that purchasers were more likely to buy cuts (National Trust, 2010).

Inadequate infrastructure and a shortfall in human resource to set up high seats and carry out culling work also proved challenging.

Therefore a project at Hatfield Forest, part of the East of England Wild Venison Project, developed to incentivise landowners, business and deer stalkers to engage in the venison trade, set out to improve and stimulate the supply of wild venison to local markets.

The Forestry Commission provided funding through the Woodland Improvement Grant Scheme, part of the English Woodland Grant Scheme and this was match funded by the National Trust. The Deer Initiative was also a key partner in the project.

As part of the project, a venison processing unit, including chiller storage, was installed at Hatfield Forest, allowing carcasses to be stored for up to 10 to 15 days, while a separate processing room, butchery equipment, packaging and labelling equipment, and a sum for local publicity were also provided.

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Further support, facilitated by the Forestry Commission, was used to provide stalker time and infrastructure such as high seats.

David Hooton, East of England deer liaison officer at the Deer Initiative, said: "The project has been very successful in supporting the conservation management on the site and in the surrounding area, creating local employment and satisfying a keen local market for the high quality venison produced."

The chiller storage, for example, has reduced the level of mileage that had been associated with taking individual carcasses to approved game handling establishments.



Credit to Jackie Pringle.

## Unprocessed carcasses had been sold at wholesale prices, which were not only low, but did not meet customer needs

As a result, venison can now be butchered on site and sold as 'cuts' – which can double its value. The meat is sold to the shop at the National Trust site and to other local establishments.

The project also resulted in the creation of one job for a butcher and will help to safeguard three existing jobs involving deer management and others involving forestry and woodland management.

The scheme has provided support for local businesses, including adjacent farms requiring a processing facility, and the outlets are now supplied with high quality meat at a reasonable price.

This case study was produced using information supplied by David Hooton, East of England deer liaison officer at the Deer Initiative.

