BestPractice Guidance

Population Assessment: Open Range Counting (2)

(continued from Open Range Counting)

Planning and communications

The key to the success, accuracy and efficiency of counts, particularly large counts, is in thorough and detailed planning, along with good communication between all involved.

1. Ensure that an appropriate Risk Assessment has been carried out and recorded where appropriate.* The Risk Assessment should apply to all operators.

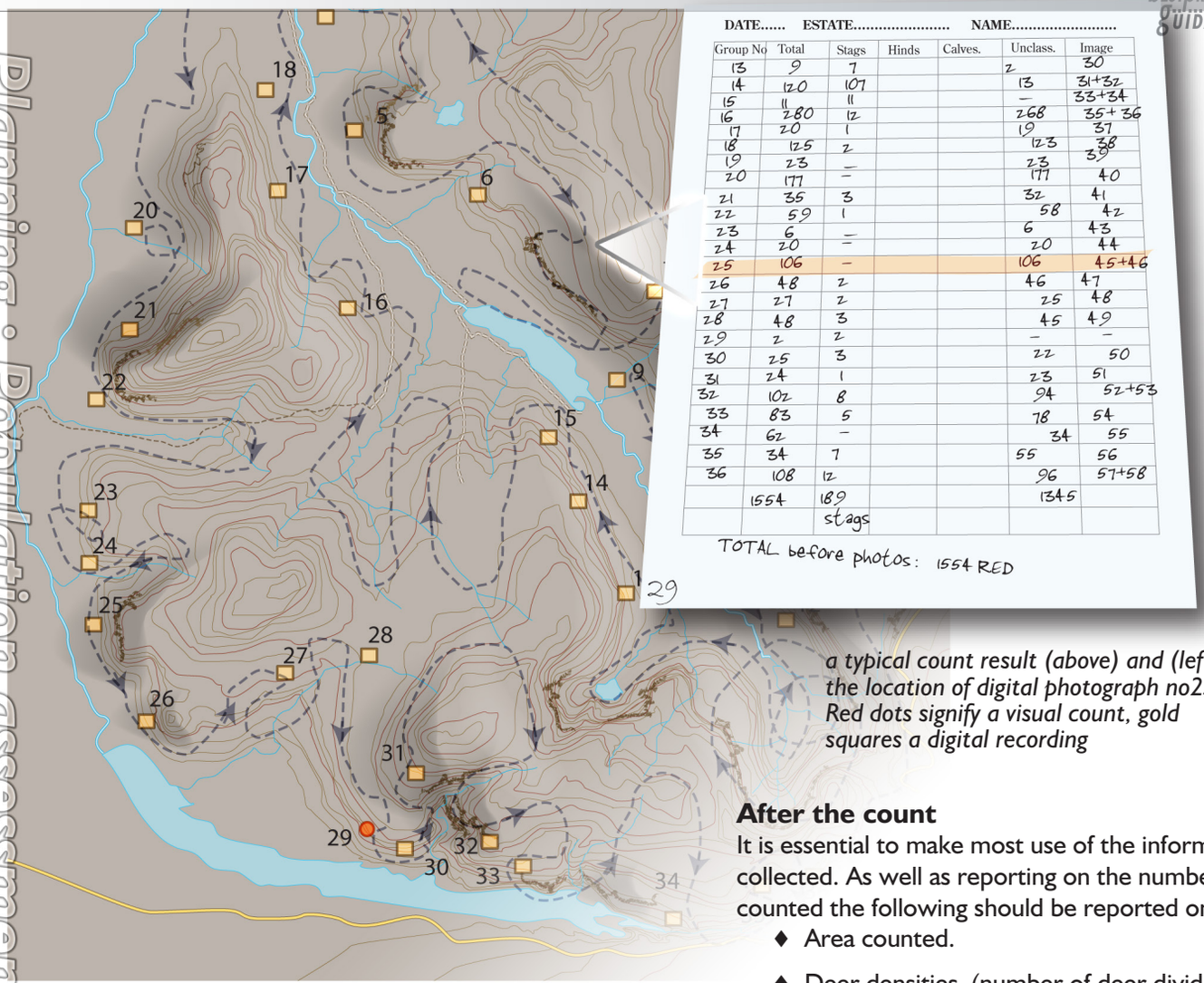
In addition to carrying out a risk assessment the following checklist should be completed:

	checklist	count	
		ground	*helicopter*
area	*area to be counted defined*		
	woodlands to be cleared identified		
	neighbours contacted		
equipment	*radios & batteries*		
	notebooks & pencil		
	binoculars/ telescopes		
	GPS		
	digital camera/ batteries		
	maps		
	health & safety equipment		
staff clearing woodland brief	*woods to clear*		
	timings		
	radio comm protocol		
	health & safety procedures		
counters brief	*routes to fly/ walk*		
	which deer to count		
	classification to use		
	record (nos, age, sex...)		
	radio comm protocol		
	health & safety procedures		
helicopter pilot brief	*routes to fly/ walk*		
	fuel dumps		
	flying hours		
	military restrictions		
	radio comm protocol		
	health & safety procedures		

a digital photograph taken from a helicopter can reveal much greater detail when processed

a second deer can be seen behind another, and calves may be distinguished from hinds

computer software may help count large groups. Each deer in the group can be marked and a different colour used for every 100 deer counted within the group



a typical count result (above) and (left) the location of digital photograph no25. Red dots signify a visual count, gold squares a digital recording

On the day

Prior to commencing counting obtain an up to date weather forecast for the area.

2 Ensure all team members are equipped with radios operating on a dedicated channel.

2 Agree protocols for radio procedures with the pilot, co-ordinator and wood clearance teams before the start of any count. Send, receive and acknowledge are essential steps. In addition team members should be clear on:

- Definition of terms to be used.
- Methods of relaying.
- Channel allocation.

3 Immediately after the count:

- Hold a 'de-briefing' with all involved to determine any potential double counting or areas missed.
- Collect all maps, notebooks, digital images, GPS routes to collate data on numbers and locations of all deer sighted and all routes walked or flown.

After the count

It is essential to make most use of the information collected. As well as reporting on the number of deer counted the following should be reported on:

- Area counted.
- Deer densities (number of deer divided by the area counted).
- Sex ratio (number of males to females assuming 50% of calves each sex and allowing for knobbers).
- Map of deer counted and area covered
- Costs (man-hours, £).
- Weaknesses and limitations:
  - Planning.
  - Area counted and woodlands cleared.
  - Weather and ground conditions.
  - Observer ability to spot, count, classify or record.
  - Digital image quality.
  - Deer behaviour and movement.
- What could be done better?

What next?

- Disseminate results to neighbours, DMG and DCS.**
- Use count to inform deer management in terms of:
  - Population size.
  - Sex ratio.
  - Likely impact on habitats.

** See BPG Risk Assessment*
*** See BPG Collaborative Deer Management*