



# USE of HELICOPTERS: SUPPORT

## Aim

The aim of this guide is to provide information and guidance on the potential uses of helicopters to assist in deer management activities.<sup>1</sup>

## Uses

Helicopters provide a means to support and co-ordinate operations involving culling with teams of rifles, including:

- ◆ Assessing culling areas.
- ◆ Determining the location, number, and sex of deer on the ground.
- ◆ Locating suitable groups of deer to be targeted.
- ◆ Fast and efficient deployment of rifles.
- ◆ Co-ordinating teams on the ground.
- ◆ Co-ordinating communications between ground teams and any base station.
- ◆ Monitoring the welfare of deer targeted by any operation.
- ◆ Monitoring surrounding area for members of the public who may be moving toward the culling area and relay details and instructions to relevant teams.
- ◆ Where required, locating and observing wounded and/or orphaned animals and directing the rifle team.
- ◆ Fast and efficient retrieval of carcasses.

- 2 Using a helicopter for this purpose may cause deer to move. Ensure you are familiar with and follow the guidance in BPG Use of Helicopters: Safeguarding Welfare.

## Constraints

The use of helicopters may be constrained by weather and cost and require training and briefing.

## Planning & preparation

- 1 Carry out a risk assessment.\*
- 2 Ensure compliance with relevant HSE Guidance.\*\*
- 2 Ensure that all team members have been equipped with the necessary protective clothing and equipment. The co-ordinator may be



required to wear a helmet and fire-retardant suit in the helicopter.\*\*\*

## Responsibilities

- 2 The pilot in command has overall control of the helicopter, being responsible for ensuring the safety of occupants and that civil aviation regulations are observed. Comply with any instructions in this regard.
- 2 In addition to standard responsibilities relating to the culling operation, the co-ordinator must:
  - Confirm safety procedures with the pilot.
  - Brief the pilot as to the operational plan and any contingency plans.
  - Clarify any potential constraints.
  - Monitor and record the position of rifles and culled deer.
  - Monitor deer welfare and take appropriate action.

## Communications

- 2 Agree protocols for radio procedures between the pilot, co-ordinator and ground teams before the start of any operation.\*\*\*
- 2 Ensure that that all details and instructions communicated to and between personnel are acknowledged and confirmed.
- 2 Ensure all team members are equipped with hands-free radios operating on a dedicated channel.

If more than one team is operating, it is recommended that each rifle team operate on a separate dedicated channel, and for the co-ordinator to have the ability to scan the different channels.

## Exit strategy for rifle and extraction teams in bad weather

- 2 Agree procedures where the helicopter is unable to extract ground teams. This should cover navigation in poor visibility, rendezvous points, methods of communication if a radio fails and remaining overnight on the hill in an emergency.

## Training

### Helicopters

- 2 Provide formal training for all pilots, co-ordinators, rifles and extraction crew prior to using a helicopter in a culling operation. Include time for initial and refresher training at onset of any operation.
- 2 Ensure that training is agreed with the helicopter company contracted to take part in an operation. This must include procedures for:
  - General helicopter procedures including safety, door operations, in both normal and emergency situations and danger points.
  - Embarking/disembarking.
  - Transporting firearms, dogs, loads (internal and under-slung).
- 2 At the start of each operation provide a safety briefing and verify that all understand and are familiar with the procedures. Highlight any additional issues specific to the operation and the aircraft being used.

### Mountain survival skills

Helicopters can add most advantage to culling operations during deep snow conditions, where teams may be deployed deep into mountainous terrain not accessible by other vehicles.

- 2 Equip and train teams to safely exit on foot or remain overnight on the hill in an emergency, should the need arise.

## Deploying onto groups of deer

- 2 Ensure that in addition to normal clothing and equipment required in culling operations, rifle teams are equipped with: safety equipment; high-visibility vests; radios; GPS, compass and

maps. Also required is equipment to ensure overnight survival and exit from area should helicopter be unable to collect teams on the ground. The co-ordinator may also need a helmet and fire-retardant suit.

## Deploying for collaborative culling

- 1 It is illegal to drive deer with a helicopter with the intention to kill.\*\*\*\*
- 3 Where a target group of deer has been located, the co-ordinator and rifle team leader should agree:
  - A proposed approach plan for the rifles.
  - Whether the helicopter will be required to remain in the vicinity, or is free to move off.
  - Whether the team will be expected to move on to other groups of deer on foot before the helicopter has returned to re-deploy them. If so, agree the location of secondary target groups.
- 2 The co-ordinator should record where and when groups of people are deployed, and the location of any groups of deer that may be targeted on foot.
- 3 In most instances it will be necessary to ensure that the helicopter is out of sight and down wind from the target deer when setting down rifle teams.
- 2 On exiting the aircraft the rifle team should follow procedures as per the safety brief provided for the aircraft used.
- 3 The helicopter should withdraw to a vantage point that does not disturb the target group of deer. This will allow the co-ordinator to relay information regarding the position of the deer to the rifle team as they approach.
- 1 It remains the responsibility of the coordinator to ensure that during the withdrawal, deer are not intentionally moved towards the rifles.
- 3 The co-ordinator should make a final communications check with the rifle team leader before leaving the area.
- 3 When ready to be picked up, team members should gather on a suitable piece of ground and put on high-visibility vests.

### Extraction

- 2 The helicopter operator must provide training for the safe handling of under-slung loads. This to include specific training on the connection method to the aircraft and protective equipment.

\* See BPG Risk Assessment \*\* See BPG Health & Safety Principles \*\*\* See BPG Team Culling & BPG Welfare: Definition & Assessment \*\*\*\* See BPG Use of Helicopters: Safeguarding Welfare

<sup>1</sup> The BPG Use of Helicopters: Safeguarding Welfare and BPG Team Culling should be seen as essential accompaniments to this guide