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Who's a pheasant plucker?

The game meat life cycle in Northern Ireland: law, markets, carbon, health and tradition

As at 21 November 2026

General information, not legal advice. The law is as checked against primary sources on 21 November 2026. Claims not checked against a primary source are shown in italics.

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This is general information, not legal advice. It sets out the law as checked against primary sources on 21 November 2026. Anyone acting on a point of law here, especially the licensing table (section 10) and road kill (section 12), should check the current position with DAERA, the FSA, the PSNI or a solicitor.

KEY FINDINGS

- **Nobody counts NI's deer.** There is no census and no cull return, so every claim about numbers rests on all-island studies, estates and trade bodies (section 2).
- **Selling game is simple; selling wild duck is not.** Game and game-dealer licences went in 2011. Selling any dead wild bird other than woodpigeon, including mallard, is an offence (section 10).
- **NI sits under EU food law for game.** Game from an approved NI establishment can go to GB and the EU without certificates; game coming in from GB needs them (section 3).
- **Lead goes later here.** GB bans the sale and use of lead shot, and the use of large-calibre lead bullets for live quarry, from 1 April 2029; the EU ban on lead gunshot, which applies in NI because it amends EU REACH, starts on 7 December 2033 and does not cover bullets (section 4.6).
- **Venison's methane is real but sits outside NI's carbon budget.** An adult deer emits roughly 288 kg CO2e a year on an old UK farmed-deer factor. Wild deer are believed to fall outside the national inventory, so a cull cuts real emissions without moving the official figures (section 4.7).
- **Deer control is part of NI's tree-planting plan, whether the plan says so or not.** Planting has to rise from about 600 ha a year to more than 2,000 ha from 2032, and when the plan was published in July 2026, 1,386 ha of the 2,585 ha target for 2023–2027 had been planted (the plan says 57%; its figures give 54%). In GB studies, tree regeneration fails where deer pressure is high (section 4.8).
- **Processing may be the real bottleneck.** No currently approved NI game-handling establishment has been confirmed, skins and feathers are mostly not used, and some shot birds reportedly go uneaten (sections 3.3, 6 and 9).
- **Curing is the obvious route to value**, under tighter EU nitrite limits that have applied in NI since 9 October 2025 (section 6.11).
- **The welfare and conservation case against released-bird shooting is real** and is set out in its own section (section 14).
- **Road kill can never be sold as food**, and removing a dead deer from someone's land without consent can be poaching (section 12).

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1. Introduction

Game is the one meat in this series that is mostly not farmed. That makes it the odd one out, and it is useful for that reason: it shows a food supply where the animal's life costs nothing in feed, fertiliser or housing, but which still needs proper rules, cold chains and a market.

1.1 What counts as game here

Wild deer (fallow, sika and red), released game birds (pheasant, red-legged partridge, mallard), wild waterfowl, woodcock and snipe, red grouse, plus rabbit, woodpigeon and, in small numbers, farmed and park deer. The Irish hare is legal quarry in its open season (section 7.6), but it is a priority species for conservation and this piece leaves it out as food by choice.

1.2 Why Northern Ireland

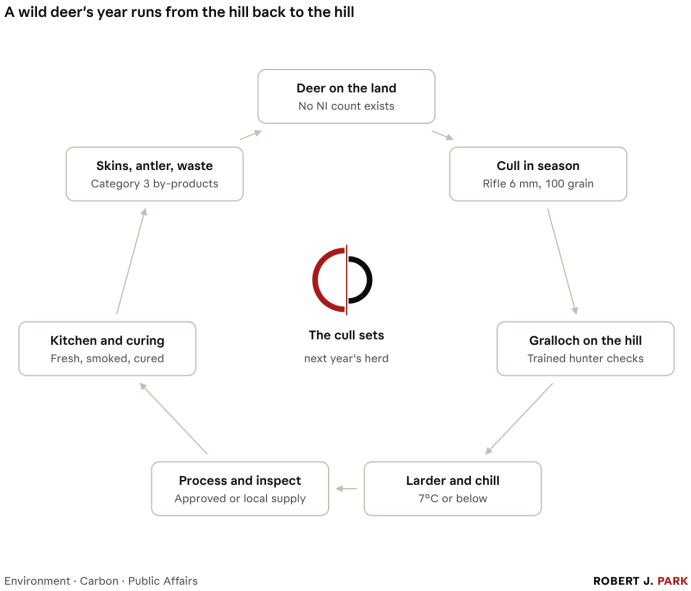
Deer ranges have grown sharply across the island since the 1970s (section 2.3). Venison is lean, and much of the venison sold in the UK is imported (section 3.1). NI also sits under EU food-hygiene law for wild game under the Windsor Framework, while GB follows assimilated and now diverging rules. That makes NI a test case for how a wild meat is governed between two regimes.

1.3 How this piece is organised

Sections 2 to 9 follow the food from the land to the plate and on to the leftovers: where game comes from, markets, carbon, health and cooking, processing and curing, species management, shops, and by-products. Sections 10 to 12 cover the law most people ask about: licensing, crow control and road kill. Section 13 is history and tradition, section 14 the case against, and section 15 the opportunities, risks and open questions. An annex covers Oisín, the Giant Irish deer and three unusual meats.

1.4 Caveat on data

NI has no annual deer census and no official game-bag statistics. Many figures here come from the island of Ireland as a whole, from GB, or from campaign and trade bodies. Each is labelled.



Source: Robert J. Park, from sections 6, 9 and 10.

The wild deer cycle at a glance: each stage has its own rules, set out in sections 6, 9 and 10.

2. Supply: where game comes from

No one counts NI's deer or game. Supply comes from estate stalking, Forest Service culls, private and syndicate shoots, and released-bird shoots. No agency maps game in NI as a whole, so the picture below is pieced together from forest, estate and club sources.

2.1 No census, no cull return

Unlike the Republic, where hunters hold licences and file returns, NI publishes no deer count and no cull figure. A Commons written answer in 2003 said no statutory body routinely collects overall wild deer numbers in England, Wales or Northern Ireland (Hansard, 22 January 2003). *DAERA published a set of deer-management answers on 16 November 2020 (DAERA), and Forest Service cull figures may have been given in NI Assembly written answers. Neither has been reviewed for this piece.*

2.2 Which deer, and where

A Forest Service (NI) paper found fallow the most widespread deer in NI forests, often tied to old estate deer parks; sika in large numbers in Tyrone and Fermanagh; and red deer a minor species spreading in from Donegal (McCurdy, Irish Forestry). It names the estate origins: Baronscourt in Tyrone, and Crom Castle and Castle Archdale in Fermanagh. *The paper is likely decades old and has not been checked against DAERA's deer answers.* DAERA examined a wild muntjac found in NI in 2012 and calls introduced deer a major concern for biodiversity, forestry, farming and road safety (DAERA, 12 March 2012).

2.3 The scale next door

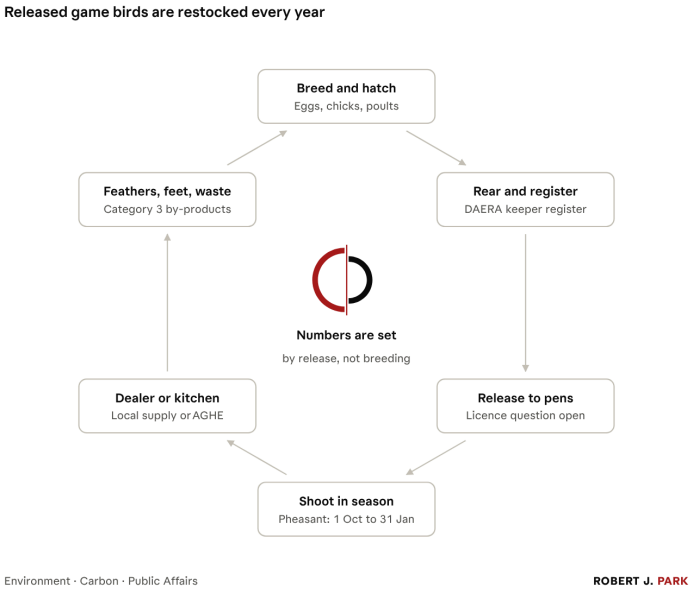
Across Ireland, ranges grew sharply between 1978 and 2008: red deer by 565%, sika by 353% and fallow by 174% (Carden et al., Mammal Review 2011). In the Republic a record 78,175 wild deer were culled in the year to 28 February 2023 (RTÉ, NPWS data). NI's border counties share those populations.

2.4 Estates as suppliers

Baronscourt (Co Tyrone) runs one of Ireland's largest pure sika herds, wild on the estate since 1920. It counts the deer each year and culls to match demand (NI Good Food). It also sells home-reared, oven-ready pheasant and duck in season. This is the model: one estate, one species, a cull plan and a direct market.

2.5 Released game birds

Pheasant and red-legged partridge are non-native birds reared and released for shooting on private estates and syndicate shoots across lowland NI. Every keeper of the birds before release must register with DAERA (section 10). *NI has no published figure for birds released or shoots run; BASC NI and GWCT estimates have not been checked.* Whether releasing pheasant and red-legged partridge needs a licence under Article 15 of the Wildlife (NI) Order 1985 is an open question (section 10).



Source: Robert J. Park, from sections 6, 9 and 10.

The released-bird cycle: birds are reared and registered, released, shot in season, supplied as food, and the waste handled as by-products.

2.6 Red grouse

Red grouse were red-listed as a species of conservation concern in Ireland after a decline of over 60% in 30 years (NI Species Action Plan, 2008). The main managed moor is at Glenwherry in the Antrim Hills, between Ballymena and Larne, where the CAFRE hill farm and partners raised summer grouse counts from 37 in 2009 to over 300 by 2019, and Irish hares from 70 to 400 (CAFRE; DAERA). The Irish grouse is of conservation concern and is still shot in its open season (section 7.1).

2.7 Wildfowl, woodcock and snipe

Strangford Lough is NI's most important coastal site for wintering waterfowl (DAERA). Wildfowling there runs through club access and a National Trust permit scheme; Lough Erne is shot under permits from the Lough Erne Wildfowlers' Council; and clubs also shoot Lough Foyle, Larne Lough and Dundrum Inner Bay (BASC NI clubs). Using lead shot on or over wetland is an offence in NI (SR 2009/168), and the EU rule in Regulation (EU) 2021/57 also bans firing or carrying lead gunshot in or within 100 m of a wetland (in force; nidirect). Clubs also lease forest shoots for woodcock in the Sperrins and around Limavady (BASC NI clubs). *Trade press reports Lough Neagh shooting leases were not renewed by the owner; the current position has not been checked.*

2.8 Hares and rabbits

The Irish hare is game under the Game Preservation Act (NI) 1928, with an open season from 12 August to 31 January (section 7.6); it does well where predators are controlled, as at Glenwherry. Rabbits are widespread. They may be shot with a firearm only by the owner or occupier, the holder of the shooting rights, or someone they authorise (1928 Act, s7A).

2.9 Public forests

Forest Service manages about 75,000 hectares of public forest (Forest Service Corporate Plan). Deer there are managed by Forest Service wildlife rangers, not by recreational stalkers; BASC has lobbied for a pilot stalking scheme (BASC). Shooting rights on some DAERA land are let by auction (DAERA, last updated 26 Feb 2019). DAERA confirmed in April 2026 that it issued no licences to shoot deer outside legal hours in the previous five years (DAERA/26-229).

2.10 Farmed and park deer

Farmed deer are farmed game. They go to an approved slaughterhouse or, with FSA authorisation, may be slaughtered on the farm under Regulation (EC) 853/2004, Annex III, Section III (legislation.gov.uk; FSA on-farm slaughter guidance). *Number of NI deer farms not yet found; the DAERA herd register has not been checked.*

3. Markets

Game has two markets that behave in opposite ways. Venison is short of home supply and imported. In GB, game birds are oversupplied, and some dealers now charge shoots to collect them (trade press; NI position not known).

3.1 Venison: a gap filled by imports

The UK imports farmed New Zealand venison. The Scottish Venison Association estimated UK imports at about 3,000 tonnes a year (Shooting Times, October 2021). *Trade-body estimate, not official. HMRC trade data under HS 0208 90 have not been checked.*

3.2 New Zealand sets the price floor

NZ farmgate venison averaged NZ$8.70 per kg in the year to 30 June 2024 (Deer Industry NZ). Wild Irish and UK venison competes against a farmed, year-round, graded product. *No published NI venison price series; ask Baronscourt and an AGHE for current carcase prices.*

3.3 Game birds: too many, too cheap

The chair of the National Game Dealers Association said in 2023 that feathered game supply outweighs demand and the UK lacks the processing capacity for the number of birds shot (Shooting Times, July 2023). By September 2025 some dealers were charging shoots to collect birds instead of paying for them; the Country Food Trust is setting up hubs to take surplus game for food banks (Shooting UK, 19 September 2025). *Trade press; NI position not covered.*

3.4 Disease shocks hit supply

In 2022, avian influenza in French game farms cut UK supplies of eggs and chicks. A shooting agency estimated that about 70% of partridge shoots and nearly a third of pheasant shoots might be cancelled (Yahoo/Guardian report, 2022). The release model depends on imported eggs.

3.5 Windsor Framework: NI is in the EU's food zone

Most NI food hygiene law sits in Annex 2 of the Windsor Framework, so EU rules (Regulations 852/2004 and 853/2004) apply in NI; GB uses assimilated versions (FSA wild game guidance). Products of animal origin coming from GB are treated as entering the EU SPS zone from a third country (DAERA). Wild deer meat from GB needs export health certificate 8367 and wild game-bird meat certificate 8372, with checks (GOV.UK, certificate 8372, updated 3 Nov 2025). *Whether game can move under the NI Retail Movement Scheme instead is not confirmed; ask DAERA.* Game handled in an approved NI establishment already meets EU rules.

3.6 The UK–EU SPS agreement

Negotiations on a UK–EU sanitary and phytosanitary agreement were concluded on 20 November 2026. The text is not yet published, and the target is for it to apply from 1 March 2028, after

signature and ratification (GOV.UK). *What the final text means for wild game, game-handling establishments and the NI Retail Movement Scheme has not been checked.*

3.7 Cross-border local supply

The FSA guidance lets hunters supply small quantities direct to consumers or local retailers. Local supply never goes beyond the UK, with one exception: NI hunters may supply into the Republic, and NI border areas may supply the neighbouring county (FSA wild game guidance, GOV.UK, updated 7 Sep 2026). That gives NI shoots a local all-island market. A restaurant in the Republic buying NI game is regulated there, by the Food Safety Authority of Ireland, so the buyer's rules matter as well.

3.8 Routes to the plate in NI

- **Direct from the hunter:** small quantities, in the fur or feather or as meat, to the consumer or a local shop or restaurant (section 6.1).
- **Estates and farm shops:** Baronscourt and a handful of farm shops and butchers (section 8).
- **Through a game dealer:** birds and deer bought from shoots and stalkers, usually processed outside NI. *No currently approved NI game-handling establishment has been confirmed (section 6.5).*
- **Restaurants and markets:** game on autumn and winter menus, and at farmers' markets. *No count found.*
- **Online and mail order:** mostly GB processors shipping into NI, which needs GB-to-NI certificates for meat (section 3.5).

3.9 UK trade data

HMRC records game meat under commodity code 0208 90 30 (fresh, chilled or frozen game other than rabbit, hare and pig) and hare and wild rabbit under 0208 10 90 (uktradeinfo). *Annual tonnages and values for these codes, and for NI separately, have not yet been pulled; HMRC's regional trade data would show NI's share.* Most UK venison imports come from New Zealand (section 3.1).

3.10 The EU market

The main European venison markets are in continental Europe, where game is a seasonal staple. Game from an approved NI establishment can go into the EU and the Republic without a health certificate under the Windsor Framework (section 3.5), which GB game cannot. *Market sizes for Germany, Belgium and the Netherlands are not yet sourced from Eurostat.*

3.11 Third countries

NI exporters reach markets outside the UK and EU through DAERA's certificate system. Examples DAERA lists include wild venison to Hong Kong and deer skins to China, the latter only from establishments registered with Chinese customs (DAERA).

3.12 What it means

NI's dual market access is a genuine advantage for game: an approved NI game-handling establishment can sell into GB and the EU without certificates. What is missing is the plant to do it

at scale, and the trade data to show what moves now.

4. Carbon and environment

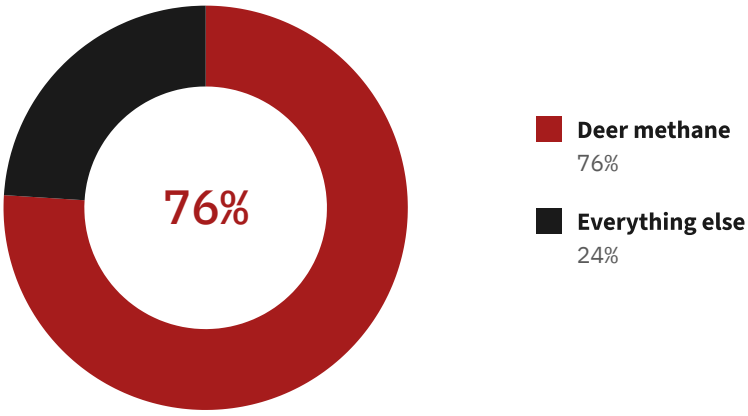
Wild venison's carbon case is strong but depends on one accounting choice: whether the deer's own methane counts. Its environmental case is stronger still, because culling protects woodland. Released birds and lead shot cut the other way.

4.1 The footprint depends on the boundary

A 2009 life-cycle study for the Deer Commission for Scotland put wild venison's footprint 38% below beef and 49% below lamb; methane from digestion and dung made up 76% of it (NatureScot Archive Report 024). An Italian study that left out enteric methane, treating the wild deer as an input from nature, got 4.85 kg CO2e per functional unit, with hunters' driving almost 85% of the impact (Fiala et al., 2019).

Three-quarters of wild venison’s footprint is the deer’s own methane

Share of the footprint of Scottish wild venison



Source: NatureScot Archive Report 024 (2009)

Count the deer's own methane and it dominates; leave it out and the footprint is mostly fuel and chilling (section 4.3).

STUDY	WHAT IT MEASURED	RESULT	NOTE
NatureScot, 2009	Scottish wild venison, life cycle	38% below beef; 49% below lamb	Methane was 76% of the total
SAC Consulting, 2024	Scottish wild venison, estate to retail product (methane 88.6%)	22.3 kg CO2e per kg	Includes deer methane; excludes browsing damage and peat erosion. Slides only
Fiala et al., 2019	Italian wild venison chain	4.85 kg CO2e	Excludes enteric methane

Beef carries about 1.6 times venison's footprint; lamb about twice

Footprint per kg as an index, wild venison = 100. Worked out from the 2009 study's '38% below beef, 49% below lamb'



Source: NatureScot Archive Report 024 (2009); index calculated here

4.2 The newer Scottish figure

An SAC Consulting study for the Scottish Venison Association reportedly gives 22.3 kg CO2e per kg of carcase, including deer methane (presentation slides, 2024). *Taken from presentation slides; the published report has not been seen.*

4.3 The honest position

The deer would emit methane whether or not anyone ate them. If the cull is needed anyway, the marginal carbon of eating the meat is close to the fuel, chilling and processing. That argument holds only while venison is a by-product of necessary control, not a reason to keep more deer. *NI has no census and no browsing survey, so the case that the NI cull is necessary rests on all-island range growth (section 2.3) and GB woodland evidence (section 4.4), not on NI data.*

4.4 Deer and woodland carbon

A study of 82 woodland creation sites in England and Scotland found deer activity strongly held back tree recruitment, with recruitment failing above a threshold level of activity (Forest Research, 29 May 2026). For NI's planting targets and peatland restoration, uncontrolled deer are a carbon cost. *No NI-specific browsing survey found.*

4.5 Released gamebirds

A rapid evidence review for Natural England and BASC found released gamebirds have direct and indirect effects, mostly near release pens, and that effects in the wider landscape are uncertain (Madden and Sage 2020, NEER016). England introduced a licence regime near protected sites in 2021 (Natural England advice, 20 April 2021). *Whether NI has an equivalent control has not been checked; the likely counterpart is NIEA consent for operations in Areas of Special Scientific Interest.*

4.6 Lead: one picture

Lead from ammunition reaches the environment, scavengers and the plate. The rules differ on each side of the Irish Sea.

WHERE	RULE	FROM
NI	Offence to fire lead shot on or over wetland, marsh, peatland or water, including sea water up to 6 m deep at low tide (NIEA leaflet, Feb 2026)	In force

WHERE	RULE	FROM
GB	UK REACH restriction made law (GOV.UK)	1 Apr 2026
GB	Lead bullets restricted at outdoor ranges	1 Apr 2028
GB	Sale and use of lead shot banned; large-calibre lead bullets banned for live quarry (Defra, 31 Jul 2026)	1 Apr 2029
EU and NI	Regulation (EU) 2026/2530 adopted 16 Nov 2026: point-of-sale warnings	7 Jun 2027
EU and NI	Packaging labels	7 Jun 2028
EU and NI	Lead gunshot banned for hunting and sports shooting, and from sale; bullets, slugs and airgun pellets not covered (OJ copy)	7 Dec 2033

The UK REACH restriction does not apply in NI, where EU REACH applies. *Regulation 2026/2530 amends EU REACH, which applies in NI, but its application here has been read from the Official Journal text, not confirmed on EUR-Lex.* NI will be about 4.7 years behind GB on lead shot, with no bullet restriction at all.

Lead in the gralloch. Gut piles left on the hill from deer shot with lead bullets carry fragments that scavenging birds eat: buzzards, ravens and red kites. Lead-free ammunition, or burying the gralloch, removes the risk. *No NI study of lead in scavenging birds has been found.*

Lead in food. There is no EU maximum level for lead in game meat; the FSA relies on advice to consumers instead (section 5.3). A producer who goes lead-free can say so, provided the claim can be backed up.

What a buyer should specify. Lead-free shot (steel, bismuth or tungsten) for birds, and lead-free (usually copper) bullets for deer. Copper bullets fragment less. *Ballistic claims are from general shooting practice, not an official source.*

4.7 Methane: what deer emit and how it is counted

Deer are ruminants. Like cattle and sheep, they make methane in the rumen and belch it out. That gas is most of venison's footprint: the NatureScot study in 4.1 put methane at 76% of the total.

How much per animal. The UK inventory once carried a factor for farmed deer: 10.4 kg of methane a head a year from digestion and 0.26 kg from manure for adult stags and hinds, and half that for calves (NAEI annual report 1998, Table A40, citing Sneath et al. 1997). At the IPCC's current 100-year factor for non-fossil methane (27.0), one adult deer comes to about 288 kg CO2e a year; a thousand adults, about 288 tonnes. These are farmed-deer factors and nearly 30 years old; wild deer on poorer forage may differ. *No current UK or NI factor for wild deer has been checked against the inventory annexes.*

How the gas is weighed. Methane traps far more heat than carbon dioxide but lasts only about 12 years in the air, not centuries. IPCC AR6 (2021, WGI Table 7.15) gives a 100-year global warming potential of 27.0 for non-fossil methane and 29.8 for fossil methane; the GHG Protocol adopted these values in August 2024. Some argue for GWP*, which scores a steady methane source as adding little new warming; Imperial's Grantham Institute warns that either metric, used wrongly, gives misleading messages. This piece uses GWP100 throughout, because UK and EU reporting does.

DEER	METHANE FROM DIGESTION (KG A YEAR)	METHANE FROM MANURE (KG A YEAR)	TOTAL METHANE (KG A YEAR)	CO2E AT GWP100 OF 27.0 (KG A YEAR)
Adult stag or hind	10.4	0.26	10.66	about 288
Calf	5.2	0.13	5.33	about 144
1,000 adults	10,400	260	10,660	about 288,000

Factors: NAEI annual report 1998, Table A40 (farmed deer, Sneath et al. 1997). Warming potential: IPCC AR6 WGI Table 7.15 (2021).

On a 1998 farmed-deer factor, an adult deer emits about 288 kg CO2e a year

Methane from digestion and manure, kg CO2e per head per year at GWP100 of 27.0



Source: NAEI annual report 1998, Table A40 (farmed deer); IPCC AR6 WGI Table 7.15

Who counts it. National inventories count methane from managed livestock. Wild deer are treated as nature: *their methane is believed to sit outside the UK and NI inventory totals, but this has not been confirmed in the inventory documentation.* If so, a cull cuts real emissions without moving the official figures, and venison's methane appears only in a product footprint, never in NI's carbon budget.

What it means for venison.

- A wild deer emits whether or not anyone eats it. Venison from a cull that would happen anyway carries methane the meal did not cause. How much of it to allocate to the meat is a method choice, and studies differ.
- Fewer deer means less methane. Where culling reduces a population, rather than only taking its yearly increase, emissions fall too.
- Methane is not the whole picture. The SAC study (4.2) counts deer methane but leaves out browsing damage to trees and peat erosion, which may matter more.

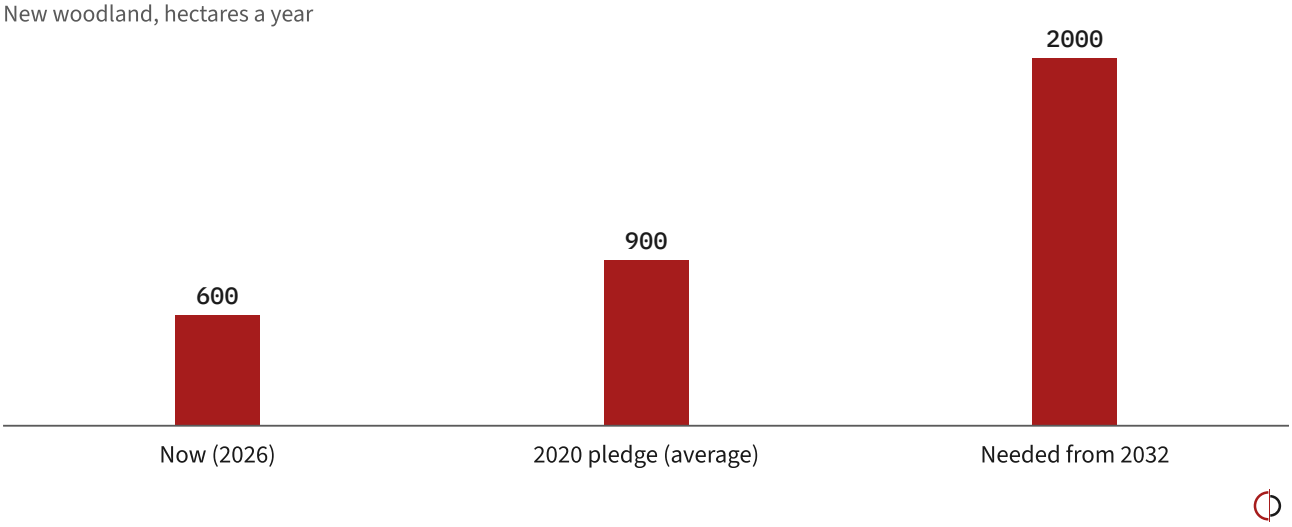
4.8 Carbon capture: woodland, peat and soil

Here carbon capture means carbon taken up and held by land: trees, soils and peat. It does not mean industrial carbon capture and storage, which has no link to game.

Where NI stands. Woodland covers 8.6% of NI's land, about 119,000 ha (forestry statistics at 31 March 2025, as given in the Tree Planting Action Plan). DAERA's Forests for our Future, launched on 2 March 2020, pledged 18 million trees and 9,000 ha of new woodland by 2030. The first NI Tree Planting Action Plan 2026–2032 (DAERA, 2026) says planting must rise from about 600 ha a year now to more than 2,000 ha a year from 2032, and that about 50,000 ha of new woodland is needed between 2026 and 2050. For the 2023–2027 carbon budget the target is 2,585 ha; 1,386 ha had been planted, which the plan calls 57%, and 1,205 ha was still needed. On the plan's own figures 1,386 ha is 54% of 2,585 ha, and 1,386 plus 1,205 makes 2,591 ha. The plan does not explain either difference. The Woodland Trust said in June 2025 that progress was well below the level needed.

Planting must more than treble

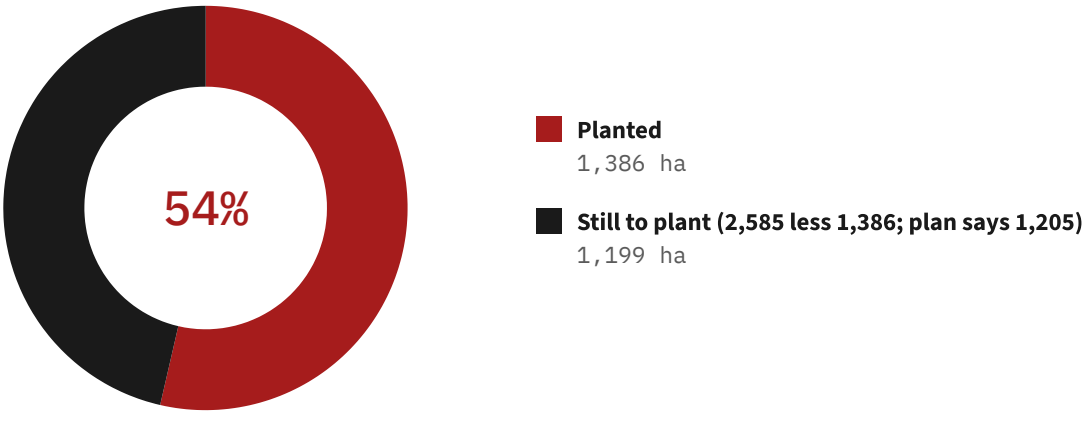
New woodland, hectares a year



Source: Tree Planting Action Plan 2026–2032, s3.3.3; DAERA Forests for our Future (9,000 ha over 2020 to 2030)

About 54% of the 2023 to 2027 woodland target was planted (the plan says 57%)

Carbon budget 2023 to 2027, hectares of new woodland



Source: Tree Planting Action Plan 2026–2032, s3.3.2 (July 2026)

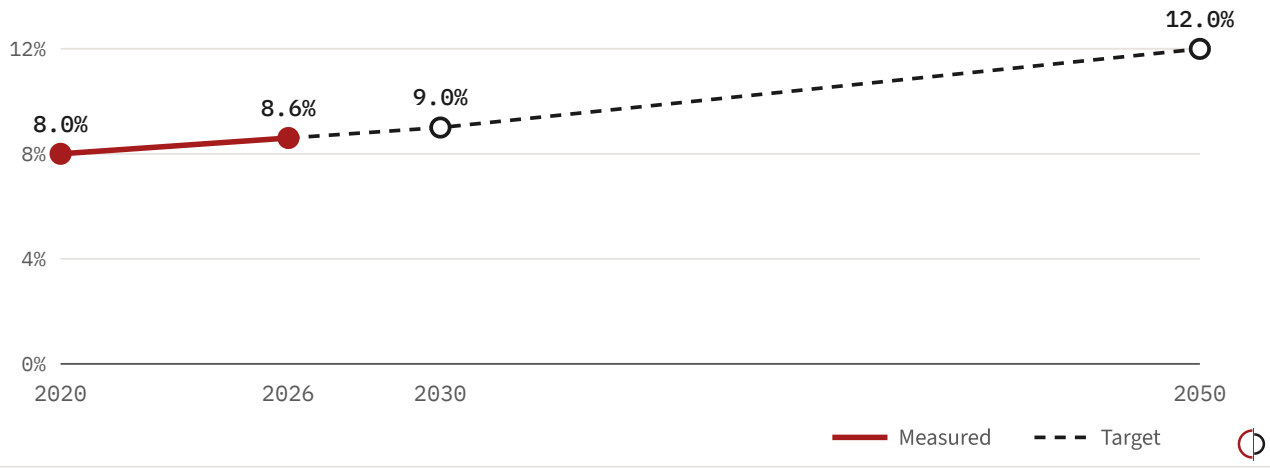
The long target. When Forests for our Future was launched in March 2020, DAERA put NI's forest cover at 8%, well behind the rest of the UK. Launching the Tree Planting Action Plan on 7 July 2026, Minister Andrew Muir said farmers will play a key role, given how much of NI is farmland. The

plan supports the aim of 12% woodland cover by 2050. Reported cover rose from about 8% (2020) to 8.6% (2026); part of that rise may reflect re-measurement rather than new planting. Reaching 12% means roughly another 50,000 ha in 24 years, most of it on farms rather than on the public estate.

YEAR	WOODLAND MILESTONE	SOURCE
2020	Forest cover about 8%; Forests for our Future launched (2 March)	DAERA
2023–2027	Carbon budget target 2,585 ha; 1,386 ha planted	Tree Planting Action Plan, s3.3.2
2026	Forest cover 8.6%, about 119,000 ha	Tree Planting Action Plan, s3.2.1
2030	9,000 ha of new woodland and 18 million trees (Forests for our Future); 9% cover, 124,000 ha (Environmental Improvement Plan)	DAERA; Tree Planting Action Plan, Annex A
From 2032	More than 2,000 ha a year	Tree Planting Action Plan, s3.3.3
2050	12% forest cover; about 50,000 ha more between 2026 and 2050	DAERA, 7 July 2026; Tree Planting Action Plan, s3.3.3

Forest cover has to rise from 8.6% to 12% by 2050

Share of Northern Ireland's land under woodland, measured and targeted



Source: DAERA, 2 March 2020 and 7 July 2026; Tree Planting Action Plan 2026–2032, s3.2.1 and Annex A

The Queen's Green Canopy. The Queen's Green Canopy (QGC) was a UK-wide tree-planting initiative for Queen Elizabeth II's Platinum Jubilee. It launched in May 2021 and ran over two planting seasons, the second from October 2022 to the end of March 2023. The royal household's closing statement (April 2023) gives the total as over 2 million trees in one place and over three million in another; the QGC page says over three million. *No NI total has been found.* In NI the QGC ran alongside DAERA's own programme:

- **Planting.** The Forest Service planted a Jubilee grove at Tollymore Forest Park, NI's first state forest park, on 13 June 2022. Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council planted almost 14,000

QGC trees at Letterloan and Camus, paid for through DAERA's Small Woodlands Grant Scheme. Belfast City Council's QGC planting counts towards its own aim of a million trees by 2035.

- **Ancient trees.** Two NI trees were among the 70 Ancient Trees dedicated to the Queen across the UK: the Belvoir Oak, thought to be about 500 years old and possibly one of NI's oldest oaks, and the Florencecourt Yew in Co. Fermanagh. *Three NI woods were among the 70 Ancient Woodlands: Brackfield Wood and Faughan Valley Woods in Co. Londonderry, Antrim Castle Garden, and Hazelbank Park in Newtownabbey.*
- **The Commonwealth Canopy.** A separate scheme, the Queen's Commonwealth Canopy, accredited Glenarm Forest in Co. Antrim as NI's first conservation forest in the network, announced to the Assembly by Minister Poots on 8 November 2021.

What the canopy tells us. The QGC was good at getting schools, councils and communities to plant, and at dedicating trees that already stand. It was not built to change the national planting rate. *Whether QGC trees in NI were counted towards the Forests for our Future hectares, or only counted where they were grant-funded, has not been checked.* For game and deer the lesson is the same as for any new planting: a small grove or a council wood still needs protection from deer, hares and rabbits in its first years, and a tree dedicated to a monarch is browsed like any other.

Why deer matter here. Young trees need protecting from browsing. Forest Research (29 May 2026; see 4.4) found deer suppress tree regeneration. Fencing is costly and, at scale, impractical; stalking is the other tool. That makes deer control part of NI's carbon plan, and venison a by-product of it. *The Tree Planting Action Plan 2026–2032 does not mention deer, browsing or tree protection.*

Soil and peat hold more than trees. The action plan says forest soils and organic matter hold two to three times more carbon than the trees above them, and it keeps a presumption against planting on deep peat or active raised bog. That matters for game ground: snipe bog, hill grazing and upland deer range are often on peat. DAERA has restored peatland on 1,073 ha of the Forest Service estate over five years *(reported by Agriland from a ministerial answer in 2025; not checked against the Assembly record)*. Trampled or over-grazed peat loses carbon.

Carbon credits. *Woodland and peatland projects can earn credits under the Woodland Carbon Code and the IUCN Peatland Code; whether and how these apply to NI land has not been verified for this piece.* Anyone pricing a planting scheme should count deer control as a running cost, not a one-off.

The honest position. Stalking and shooting can help carbon capture, by protecting young trees and keeping peat wet and undisturbed, or harm it, where high deer numbers stop regeneration or drained ground loses carbon. The carbon case lies in the management, not in the meat.

5. Health and cooking

Venison is among the leanest red meats. The main health risk in game is lead from ammunition, not the meat itself. Disease risks to people are low but worth watching.

5.1 Official advice: venison is red meat

The NHS lists venison as red meat. Anyone eating more than 90 g of red or processed meat a day (cooked weight) should cut down to an average of 70 g (NHS, reviewed 1 May 2024). Game sits inside that limit, not outside it.

5.2 Lean and high in iron

Raw venison has about 103 kcal, 22 g protein, 1.6 g fat and 3.3 mg iron per 100 g (Patient.info). *Secondary; confirm against the UK Composition of Foods Integrated Dataset (CoFID).*

5.3 Lead-shot game

The FSA advises that frequent eating of lead-shot game can expose people to harmful lead levels. Toddlers, children, pregnant women and women trying for a baby should cut down especially. The advice covers deer, duck, goose, partridge, pheasant, rabbit and other species (FSA, applies to England, NI and Wales). The NHS tells pregnant women to avoid game such as goose, partridge and pheasant for this reason (NHS). The FSA gives no safe number of portions. NI's later lead timetable is set out in section 4.6.

5.4 Cooking

Venison is lean, so it is usually cooked fast (loin, haunch steaks) or slow and wet (shoulder, shin, neck). Game birds are roasted young and braised when old. The NHS says poultry and game birds such as duck and goose should be cooked until steaming hot with no pink meat, and allows pink only for whole cuts of beef or lamb (NHS). It gives no specific advice on venison. Serving venison pink is common in restaurants, but wild venison has a wound channel, possible gut contamination and can carry *Toxoplasma* in the muscle; a business serving it pink should justify that in its food safety plan, and pregnant women should avoid undercooked meat. Minced or rolled game should always be cooked through.

5.5 Lead in the dish

The FSA advises frequent eaters of lead-shot game to cut down, especially for small game, and says this matters most for toddlers, children, pregnant women and women trying for a baby (FSA). Practical steps for the cook: cut away meat around the wound channel generously, pick out shot, and ask the supplier whether lead was used. The FSA notes that large game sold in supermarkets is usually farmed and has little or no lead (GOV.UK).

5.6 Liver and kidneys

Liver and kidneys filter the blood and concentrate metals. French and North American authorities advise limiting or avoiding wild deer liver because of cadmium (and, in some US states, PFAS); a Croatian study found many game livers and kidneys over the legal limits for cadmium and lead (ANSES via FoodNavigator, 2018; New Hampshire Fish and Game; Arh Hig Rada Toksikol, 2014). *Cadmium is reported to build up with age, so liver from young animals may carry less; this has not been checked against the studies cited. No UK or NI testing of deer liver for cadmium or PFAS has been found. An occasional cooked liver is a different risk from regular eating; there is no UK advice either way.*

5.7 Raw liver and raw venison

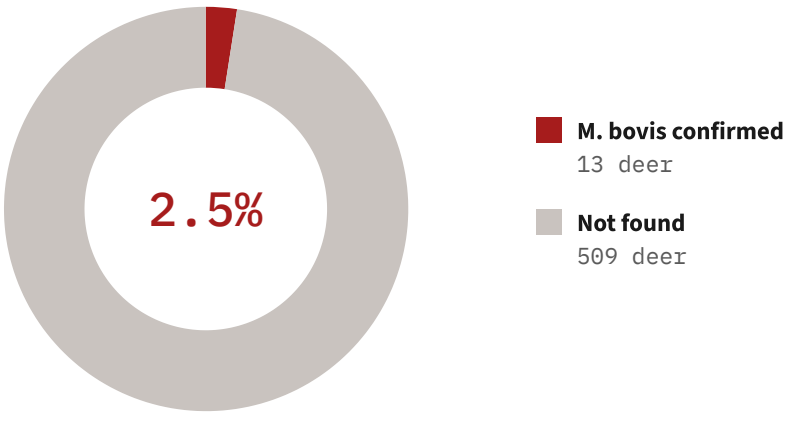
Eating raw deer meat is a proven route for hepatitis E. In Japan in 2003, four people in two families caught hepatitis E after eating raw sika venison (Tei et al., Lancet 2003), and a case-control study then linked uncooked deer meat to infection (J Med Virol, 2004). Raw game can also carry *Toxoplasma*, *E. coli* O157 and parasites. *UK-specific data on hepatitis E in deer has not been checked.* The safe line for anyone eating liver from a fresh kill is simple: cook it through. Section 13.5 covers the tradition.

5.8 Bovine TB in deer

An AFBI-led study of 522 deer culled across NI from 2019 to 2023 found 13 culture-confirmed cases of *M. bovis*, an animal prevalence of 2.5%. Whole-genome sequencing showed cattle were the main driver of transmission, with deer playing a smaller role (Allen et al., Infection, Genetics and Evolution 128 (2025) 105721). DAERA consulted on wildlife intervention for bTB in summer 2026 (DAERA, 3 September 2026). Trained-hunter inspection of the gralloch is the front line. Gloves at the gralloch protect the stalker against TB and other infections.

One in forty NI deer culled in 2019 to 2023 carried bovine TB

Deer culled across NI and tested for M. bovis



Source: Allen et al., Infection, Genetics and Evolution (2025)

Small, but not nothing: the study found cattle drove transmission, with deer a minor part.

5.9 Chronic wasting disease

CWD, a prion disease of deer, was first found in Europe in Norway in 2016 (Norwegian Veterinary Institute). Great Britain has no active CWD surveillance, but suspect cases must be reported (Defra TSE report, 2024 and 2025). *NI surveillance, which follows EU Regulation 999/2001, and current EU restrictions on cervid products from Norway, Sweden and Finland have not been checked.*

5.10 Who gets the most benefit

Wild venison is high in protein and iron and low in fat (section 5.2). For most people, eaten occasionally, cooked properly and from lead-free or carefully trimmed carcases, it is a good meat. The cautions fall on frequent eaters, children and pregnant women (lead), and on anyone eating offal raw.

6. Processing, preserving and curing

The rules for game are lighter than for farmed meat at the small end and the same at the large end. The bottleneck in NI is not regulation but the lack of confirmed, approved game-handling capacity.

6.1 Three routes to market

The FSA wild game guidance (revision 3; now on GOV.UK, page updated 7 September 2026; review was due October 2026) sets three routes (FSA wild game guidance):

1. **Private use**, including family and friends who do not pass it on: outside the hygiene rules.
2. **Small quantities direct** to consumers or local retailers: whole game in the fur or feather is exempt from the specific hygiene rules but needs traceability; supplying wild game meat (skinned, plucked or eviscerated) needs council registration and a food safety plan. "Local" means your own council area, a neighbouring one, or within 50 km (30 miles) of its boundary, with the NI-to-Republic exception in section 3.7.
3. **Supply to an approved game-handling establishment (AGHE)**: Regulations 852/2004 and 853/2004 apply in full.

Whether the guidance has been revised since its October 2026 review date has not been checked.

6.2 The trained hunter

For game going to market, at least one member of the hunting party must be a trained person who examines the carcase and viscera. For deer going to an approved game-handling establishment, the trained person attaches a numbered declaration; for direct local supply it is best practice, not a legal requirement (FSA). *In practice the training is usually the Deer Stalking Certificate Level 1 or an equivalent course; FSA recognition of specific courses has not been confirmed.*

6.3 Cold chain

Large game must be chilled to no more than 7°C at the centre of the meat, and small game to no more than 4°C; in transport, offal must be kept at no more than 3°C. Offal must stay matched to its carcase or it cannot be sold for food (FSA wild game guidance).

6.4 Collection centres: an NI-only tool

Regulation (EU) 2021/1374 created **collection centres for wild game**. It applies in NI under the Windsor Framework but not in GB. A first-stage centre receiving only bodies from hunters registers as primary production; one receiving from other centres needs approval (FSA). In NI the FSA approves game-handling establishments and wild-game collection centres; DAERA vets carry out official controls (FSA NI approvals policy, March 2025). Shared larders and collection centres are a practical way for small NI shoots and stalkers to reach an AGHE.

6.5 Game-handling establishments: how many?

A 2011 trade-press profile of the Abercorn estates (Baronscourt and Belle Isle) said their EU-approved game facility was one of only two in NI, preparing oven-ready birds and about 250 deer a year (Shooting UK, 14 June 2011). *That is 15 years old. Whether any NI game-handling establishment is approved today has not been confirmed; count them on the FSA approved-establishments list.*

6.6 Game licences are gone

The Wildlife and Natural Environment Act (NI) 2011 abolished game licences and game dealers' licences from 13 June 2011 (section 35, commenced by SR 2011/215). From 17 August 2011, section 36 removed the close-season ban on selling game, created the offence of selling game known to be taken unlawfully, and repealed the venison dealer's licence (legislation.gov.uk, s36; SR 2011/215; SR 2011/285). Scotland still requires a venison dealer's licence (Highland Council).

6.7 Hanging

Game is traditionally hung to tenderise it and develop flavour. Hanging is tradition; the legal limits are the chilling temperatures in section 6.3, which apply throughout. *Typical hanging times for venison and birds have not been sourced and are left out.* Wild boar must be tested for *Trichinella* at an AGHE (FSA). *Whether any free-living wild boar exist in NI, and NI's position on African swine fever, should be checked.*

6.8 Birds are the hard part

Game birds are dry-plucked, which is far more labour-intensive than wet-plucking poultry; one dealer said it was hard to profit even from free pheasants (Shooting Times, July 2023). Processing cost, not supply, decides whether a shot bird is eaten. *Much of the trade now breasts or skins birds rather than plucking them, which cuts cost but wastes legs and carcases; not yet sourced.*

6.9 Curing and preserving: the methods

Game was preserved long before refrigeration: salted, smoked, dried, potted under fat and pickled. The same methods now add the most value to a lean, seasonal meat.

- **Smoking:** cold-smoked venison loin and hot-smoked duck and pheasant breast.
- **Drying and curing:** air-dried venison (in the style of bresaola), venison salami and chorizo, and dried strips in the style of biltong and jerky.
- **Potting and confit:** game cooked and sealed under fat, the traditional way to keep birds through winter.
- **Pies and terrines:** cooked, set and sliced, often using shoulder, offal and small birds.
- **Pickling and brining:** spiced venison and brined tongue or heart; pickled game in vinegar with spices.

These are general methods; no NI venison charcuterie producer has been identified. Food NI and NI Good Food listings have not been searched.

6.10 Making cured venison safely

Lean venison needs added fat for salami, usually pork, which brings a second species and its own sourcing into the product. Fermented and air-dried products need validated steps for acidity and drying, and wild meat eaten uncooked needs parasite control (*Toxoplasma*), usually by freezing or a validated process. Vacuum-packed chilled products carry a risk from *Clostridium botulinum*, which the FSA's guidance on vacuum and modified-atmosphere packed foods addresses through shelf-life limits and controls. Smoked, cured and potted game is usually eaten without cooking, so it is a ready-to-eat food under Regulation (EC) 2073/2005, with *Listeria* the main concern. *The specific FSA limits (including the 10-day shelf life rule for vacuum-packed chilled food) should be checked against current FSA guidance before advising a producer.*

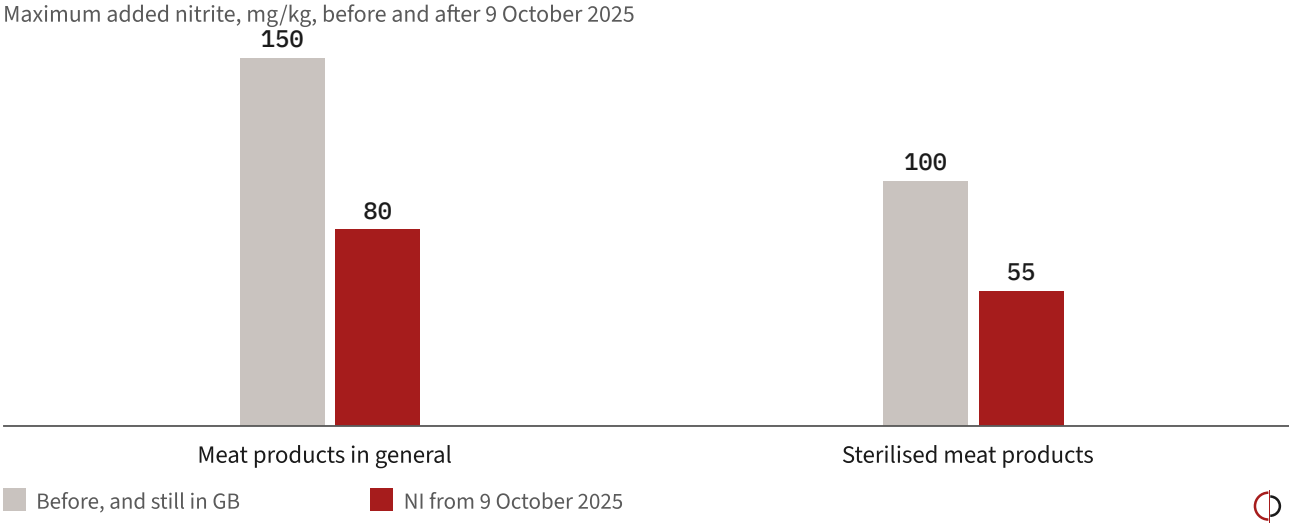
6.11 Nitrites and nitrates

Cured meats rely on nitrite to stop botulism and keep the colour. Commission Regulation (EU) 2023/2108 lowered the limits in Regulation (EC) 1333/2008 for meat products from 9 October 2025 (EUR-Lex). The FSA confirmed it applies in NI under the Windsor Framework (FSA explanatory memorandum). The maximum added nitrite for meat products in general fell from 150 to 80 mg/kg, and for sterilised products from 100 to 55 mg/kg (safefood, 2025). GB had not made the same change as at 21 November 2026. An NI producer selling into GB and the EU should make to the EU limits. *Which category fits each product should be confirmed before relying on these figures.*

PRODUCT	OLD LIMIT (MG/KG)	NEW LIMIT IN NI FROM 9 OCTOBER 2025 (MG/KG)	CHANGE	GB
Meat products in general	150	80	down 47%	still 150
Sterilised meat products	100	55	down 45%	still 100

NI's nitrite limits for cured meat fell by almost half

Maximum added nitrite, mg/kg, before and after 9 October 2025



Source: Regulation (EU) 2023/2108; FSA explanatory memorandum

6.12 Who needs what

A hunter or butcher curing game for sale direct to the final consumer at retail needs council registration. A business making meat products for sale to other businesses needs approval under

Regulation (EC) 853/2004, through the FSA in NI (section 10), unless supply to other retailers is marginal, localised and restricted, when registration may be enough. *The retail-to-retail exemption and its limits should be confirmed with the FSA.*

6.13 Why it matters for NI

Curing turns a seasonal, short-shelf-life meat into a year-round product that travels. It is the most obvious route to value for NI venison, and it fits the dual market access in section 3.12.

7. Species, populations and management

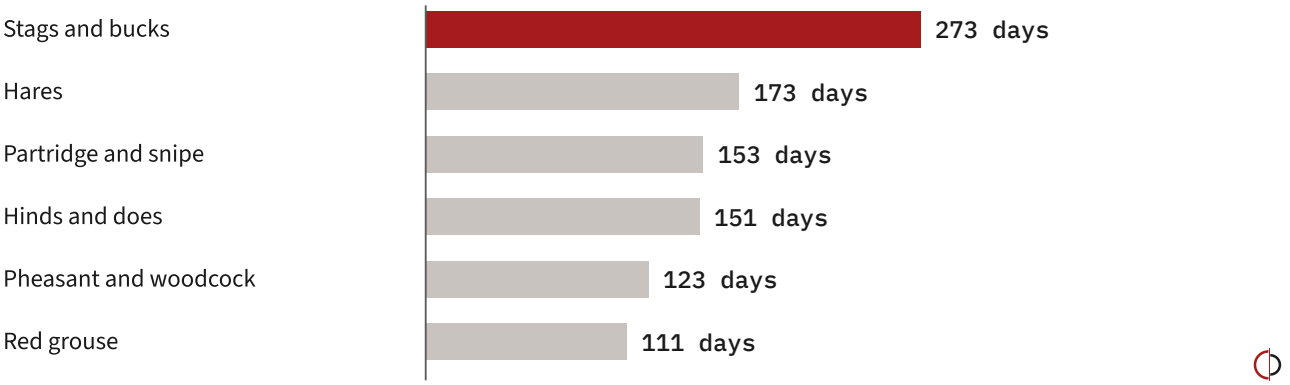
For most deer the management question is which populations to reduce. For several game birds it is the opposite: woodcock, snipe, grey partridge and red grouse are of conservation concern and are still shot and eaten in their open seasons. *Their current Birds of Conservation Concern in Ireland status should be added species by species.*

7.1 Seasons in law

Deer close seasons are set by Schedule 10 of the Wildlife (NI) Order 1985; game-bird and hare close seasons by section 7 of the Game Preservation Act (NI) 1928 (legislation.gov.uk, s7; Schedule 10). Open seasons: red and sika stags and fallow bucks 1 August to 30 April; hinds and does 1 November to 31 March; muntjac and Chinese water deer have no close season. Red grouse 12 August to 30 November; grey and red-legged partridge and snipe 1 September to 31 January; pheasant and woodcock 1 October to 31 January; hares 12 August to 31 January (NIEA leaflet, February 2026). Since 17 August 2011 DAERA may, after consulting shooting interests, declare a period of special protection for game birds of up to 14 days where it considers it expedient, in practice in severe weather (1928 Act, s7(3A) to (3C)). Wild duck, geese and other listed wildfowl may be shot from 1 September to 31 January, and not on a Sunday or at night (1985 Order, Art 5 and Sch 2). Game as defined in the 1928 Act may not be killed on a Sunday or at night (s7A).

Stags and bucks have the longest open season; red grouse the shortest

Days in the open season each year, NI law as at 21 November 2026



Source: Game Preservation Act (NI) 1928, s7; Wildlife (NI) Order 1985, Sch 10

Muntjac and Chinese water deer have no close season and are left off the chart.

QUARRY	OPEN SEASON	DAYS	LAW
Red and sika stags, fallow bucks	1 August to 30 April	273	1985 Order, Sch 10
Hares	12 August to 31 January	173	1928 Act, s7
Grey and red-legged partridge, snipe	1 September to 31 January	153	1928 Act, s7
Red and sika hinds, fallow does	1 November to 31 March	151	1985 Order, Sch 10

QUARRY	OPEN SEASON	DAYS	LAW
Pheasant, woodcock	1 October to 31 January	123	1928 Act, s7
Red grouse	12 August to 30 November	111	1928 Act, s7
Muntjac, Chinese water deer	No close season	365	1985 Order, Sch 10

The Sunday and night ban in section 7A of the 1928 Act applies to game as defined in that Act; deer at night are covered separately by the 1985 Order. Whether any Sunday restriction applies to deer stalking has not been confirmed. Seasons as at 21 November 2026.

7.2 NI set a female season the Republic may follow

The Wildlife and Natural Environment Act (NI) 2011 shortened the close season for female deer, with effect from 17 August 2011 (Schedule 10). Ireland's Deer Management Strategy Group recommended aligning its open seasons with NI's (Oireachtas, 15 February 2024). A rare case of NI policy leading.

7.3 Rifle rules for deer

Schedule 11 of the 1985 Order bans shotguns and air weapons for deer, and rifles of calibre under .236 inches (6 mm) or with a muzzle energy under 1,700 foot-pounds (2,305 joules). It also prohibits any rifle bullet other than one weighing at least 100 grains or an expanding bullet designed to deform predictably; the PSNI reads this as either (Schedule 11). Best practice, and most firearm-certificate conditions, is an expanding bullet of at least 100 grains. For Chinese water deer and muntjac only, Article 20(8A) allows a smaller rifle: calibre at least .220 inches, muzzle energy at least 1,000 foot-pounds (1,356 joules), and a soft- or hollow-nosed bullet of at least 50 grains (3.24 g) (Art 20). The PSNI also sets conditions on each firearm certificate, including whether the land is suitable for the calibre.

MINIMUM FOR DEER	IMPERIAL	METRIC
Calibre	.236 inch	6 mm
Muzzle energy	1,700 foot-pounds	2,305 joules
Bullet	at least 100 grain, or expanding (Sch 11 para 8)	about 6.5 g

Source: Wildlife (NI) Order 1985, Sch 11, as at 21 November 2026.

7.4 Red deer: small, and at risk from sika

NI's red deer population is small, with a risk of losing genetic diversity (NatureScot genetic scorecard). Hybridisation with sika is the main threat to red deer: a 2014 survey found 41% of deer sampled in Wicklow were red–sika hybrids (Smith et al., Conservation Genetics 2014). The Kerry red deer descend from an introduction about 5,000 years ago and merit conservation (UCD repository). Culling sika in Tyrone and Fermanagh protects red deer spreading from Donegal.

7.5 Grey partridge: a native game bird lost

Wild grey partridge was declared extinct in NI in 1992. In December 2014 the Republic gave NI 29 birds to start a reintroduction run by NIEA (Irish Grey Partridge Conservation Trust, 13 December 2014). *The project's outcome has not been checked. Grey partridge still appears in the NI open season (1928 Act, s7); whether any special protection applies has not been confirmed.*

7.6 Irish hare

The Irish hare is game under the 1928 Act, with an open season from 12 August to 31 January (1928 Act, s7). It is not in Schedule 5 of the 1985 Order (Schedule 5). It has had temporary special protection orders in the past, banning killing and sale, for example from 1 November 2008 to 31 March 2009 (SR 2008/407). Hare coursing has been banned since 17 August 2011 (2011 Act, s38). *Whether any special protection order is in force now has not been confirmed.* It is a priority species for conservation, and this piece treats it as not a food species by choice.

7.7 Invasive arrivals

DAERA examined a wild muntjac in NI in 2012 (DAERA). Muntjac and Chinese water deer are not listed in Schedule 10, so they have no close season. Current NI muntjac records (CEDaR) have not been checked.

7.8 Welfare of the cull

A good cull is quick: a well-placed shot from a suitable rifle, at a range the stalker can manage. Wounded deer must be followed up, often with a trained tracking dog, and dispatched humanely; the Welfare of Animals Act (NI) 2011 applies to animals under a person's control. Female close seasons protect does and hinds with dependent young. *No NI data on wounding rates has been found, and none is collected.*

8. Shops and craft trade

NI's game trade is a handful of estates, farm shops and butchers, with restaurants doing most of the selling. There is no NI game brand and no protected name.

8.1 Baronscourt sets the standard

Baronscourt Wild Sika Venison has won Great Taste awards every year since 2014, including the 2022 Golden Fork for Northern Ireland for its loin (Baronscourt). It supplies Lough Erne Resort, Grants (Omagh), Belfast restaurants and Stewarts Butchers in Enniskillen, and is a Food NI member (Baronscourt).

8.2 Farm shops and butchers

Examples include Greenmount Farm Shop, which sells wild venison weekly in season, plus sausages, burgers and pies (Love British Food directory), and Pheasants Hill Farm Shop, Downpatrick, which lists wild venison, wild boar and game (4NI listing). *Directory listings; confirm each is current.*

8.3 Quality assurance exists, but who is in it?

The British Quality Wild Venison (BQWV) standard launched in 2023 and covers England, Wales and NI, audited by Intertek (GOV.UK; Intertek). BASC runs a group scheme for stalkers taking up to 300 deer a year (BASC). *Whether any NI producer or approved game-handling establishment is accredited has not been checked.*

8.4 The Republic is moving faster

Irish press reports a push to reposition wild Irish venison as a sustainable staple, with new processors such as Kerry Wild Game, founded in 2020 (Irish Examiner). Wild Irish Game in Wicklow supplies Sysco Ireland's foodservice list (Sysco Ireland). NI could share an all-island wild venison story.

8.5 No protected name

No UK or EU geographical indication for venison or game birds was found. The UK GI register and EU eAmbrosia have not been searched exhaustively. Pork had Wiltshire-cure traditions; game's equivalent is estate provenance ("Baronscourt sika") rather than a registered name.

8.6 Gaps

- No NI game-bird brand or oven-ready pheasant in supermarkets.
- No published list of NI outlets for lead-free game.
- No NI venison charcuterie found.
- No food-tourism trail that links estates, cookery schools and restaurants. *Tourism NI and Food NI listings have not been checked.*

9. The whole animal and its by-products

A deer's carcase is roughly half to two-thirds of its live weight, and the boneless meat is roughly half of the field-dressed weight. The rest, especially the skin, is mostly wasted. Game birds are worse: whole birds go unused when no one will pay to pluck them. This section covers what else can be used and the rule that governs each.

9.1 Yield

Dressing-out percentage is the carcase as a share of live weight: the FAO puts it at 48–60% for fallow deer and 51–65% for red deer, with adults yielding better than young deer (FAO). Boneless meat runs at about 48% of field-dressed weight in North American studies; a shoulder shot cuts yield by about 3 percentage points (University of Wyoming). *No NI or UK sika yield data found.*

9.2 The gralloch on the hill

Blood and green offal left at the kill site during normal hunting fall outside the animal by-product rules (FSA wild game guide). The FSA's preferred options are still incineration or rendering, burial on the holding, or double-bagging for landfill. Retained red offal (liver, heart) must stay matched to its carcase to be sold. Lead fragments in a gralloch from a deer shot with lead are a hazard to scavenging birds (section 4.6).

9.3 By-product law

Three things sit outside the animal by-products rules altogether (Regulation (EC) 1069/2009, Art 2(2)):

- whole bodies or parts of wild animals other than wild game, not suspected of disease (Art 2(2)(a)): the basis for road casualties (section 12);
- bodies or parts of wild game not collected after the kill, in line with good hunting practice (Art 2(2)(b)): the gralloch left on the hill;
- by-products of wild game and wild game meat supplied directly in small quantities under the local-supply exemption (Art 2(2)(c)).

Food kept for private domestic use falls outside the food hygiene rules (Regulation (EC) 853/2004, Art 1(3)), not under Article 2. Once game reaches a larder or AGHE, anything not eaten is an animal by-product under Regulation (EC) 1069/2009, which applies in NI under the Windsor Framework, and the Animal By-Products (Enforcement) Regulations (NI) 2015. Hides, skins, feathers, feet, heads and fur from healthy animals are Category 3 material, the lowest-risk class (Art 10). *Confirm the category for wild deer heads in view of TSE rules.*

9.4 Skins and hides

Deer hides make soft, strong leather; skins can be tanned with the hair on as rugs. 'Treated' hides are those dried, or dry- or wet-salted for at least 14 days before dispatch (Regulation (EU) 142/2011, Annex I). Deer skins to China must come from a plant registered with Chinese customs (section

3.11). Billy Tannery says deerskins are a "shockingly under-utilised" leather source in the UK and most go to waste, though European luxury brands prize deer leather (Leatherbiz, 12 March 2024). Over half of British cattle hides and nearly all sheepskins are exported or thrown away, and UK tanning capacity is the bottleneck (Sustainable Food Trust). *Campaign and trade sources. No NI tannery for deer found.*

9.5 Fur

Hare and rabbit pelts can be tanned for trim and craft. The Irish hare is game, not a Schedule 5 animal (section 7.6), so a lawfully killed hare's pelt can be used.

9.6 Feathers

Pheasant, partridge, woodcock and duck feathers go to fly-tying, millinery and craft. Untreated feathers must be packed securely and dry and come from registered or approved plants (Regulation (EU) 142/2011, Annex XIII Ch VII). The EU bans imports of untreated feathers, so feathers from outside the EU entering NI must be treated (Regulation (EU) 142/2011, Art 25(1)(b)). *Confirm how this applies to GB-to-NI movements under the Windsor Framework.* Treated feathers need no health certificate (DAFM).

9.7 Beaks, feet and heads

Bird feet and heads are Category 3 material. They can go to pet food through an approved pet food plant, or to rendering. Dried feet sold as dog chews count as pet food and need that approval. *No NI pet food plant handling game by-products has been identified.*

9.8 Antler, bone and trophies

In New Zealand's farmed sector, co-products make up at least 10% of a processed deer's value (Deer Industry NZ). Cast and cut antler goes to knife handles, buttons and dog chews; bones make stock. Fully treated game trophies need no health certificate; untreated trophies need certification under Regulation (EU) 142/2011, Annex XIV. *Value from wild NI deer is unknown.*

9.9 Unwanted birds

The real loss is whole birds: when dealers charge for collection, some shot birds are not eaten at all (section 3.3). *Reports of shot birds being dumped are anecdotal and have not been verified.*

9.10 The opportunity

Most of these parts are wasted in NI now. A collection point for skins, feathers and antler, linked to a craft or pet food outlet, would add value without changing anything about the shoot. *An opportunity, not a finding.*

10. Licensing and permissions, field to plate

NI abolished the game licence and the game dealer's licence in 2011, so there is no single permit for game. Instead a chain of separate permissions applies, each held by a different person. Status as checked on 21 November 2026.

STAGE	WHAT IS NEEDED	WHO ISSUES IT	LAW
Right to shoot	Owner's or occupier's consent; sporting rights may be let separately from the land	Landowner; DAERA lets some rights by auction	Common law; Wildlife (NI) Order 1985 Art 22 (deer poaching, including removing a carcase without consent)
Firearm	Firearm certificate covering rifles and shotguns, with conditions on use	PSNI	Firearms (NI) Order 2004
Taking a firearm to the Republic	Garda non-resident firearm certificate and NPWS deer licence; *European Firearms Pass requirement to confirm with the PSNI*	Garda, NPWS, PSNI	Firearms (NI) Order 2004; Irish Wildlife Acts
Deer out of season or at night	Licence (up to two years) or the damage defence	DAERA (NIEA)	1985 Order Arts 20(6) and 21
Shooting game	No licence since 13 June 2011; seasons and the Sunday and night ban apply	None	Game Preservation Act (NI) 1928 ss7, 7A; 2011 Act s35
Keeping birds for release	Registration as a bird keeper	DAERA	*Avian influenza rules; exact regulation to confirm*
Releasing pheasant and red-legged partridge	*Open question: Art 15 bans releasing animals not ordinarily resident, with no game-bird exception*	DAERA (NIEA)	1985 Order Art 15
Taking mallard eggs and keeping mallard for release	General licence	DAERA (NIEA)	1985 Order Art 18(2)(b)
Selling game	No dealer's licence since 13 June 2011; selling game known to be taken unlawfully is an offence	None	2011 Act ss35–36
Selling dead wild ducks, geese and other wild birds	Not allowed: an offence for anyone not registered under Department regulations, and no such regulations have been found; woodpigeon is the only exception	None	1985 Order Art 7(2), Sch 3
Supplying wild game meat in small quantities locally	Registration as a food business	District council	Regulation (EC) 852/2004
Inspecting carcases for wider sale	'Trained hunter' status	Training course	Regulation (EC) 853/2004

STAGE	WHAT IS NEEDED	WHO ISSUES IT	LAW
Processing for wider sale	Approval as a game-handling establishment	FSA in NI, with DAERA vets	Regulation (EC) 853/2004
Making cured or smoked game products	Retail registration if selling direct; approval if supplying other businesses beyond the retail exemption	District council or FSA	Regulations 852/2004, 853/2004
By-products (skins, feathers) leaving the chain	Registration or approval of the plant handling them	DAERA	Regulation (EC) 1069/2009; ABP (Enforcement) Regs (NI) 2015
Exporting beyond the UK and EU	Export health certificate	DAERA (DECS)	Destination country rules

The PSNI's 2026 wildlife leaflet states plainly that selling or possessing for sale any wild bird, wildfowl included, except woodpigeon, is an offence (PSNI, Feb 2026; Art 7). Game birds (pheasant, partridge, woodcock, snipe and red grouse) are not 'wild birds' for this purpose (Art 2). *FSA recognition of specific trained-hunter courses has not been confirmed.*

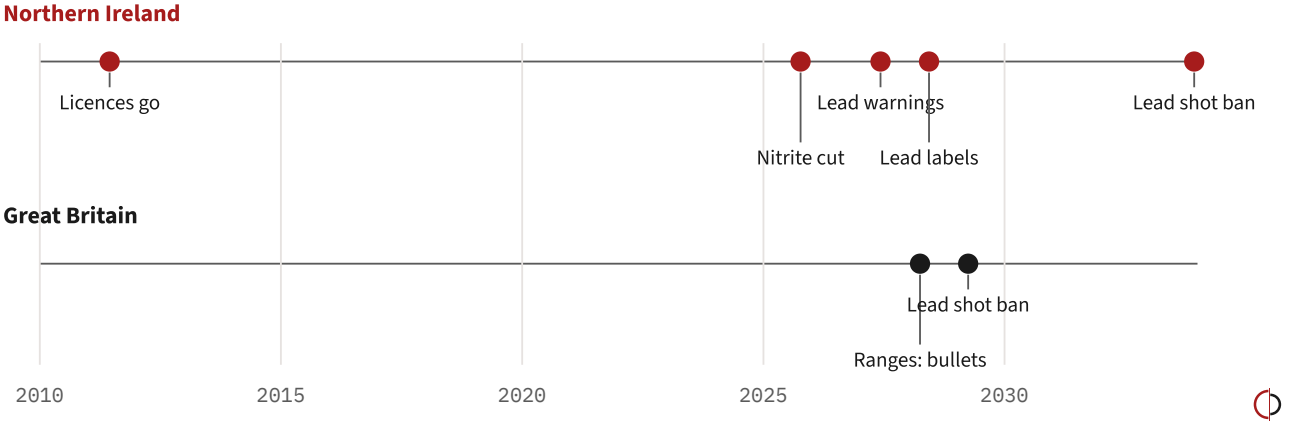
Dates that matter

DATE	WHAT CHANGES	WHERE	LAW
13 June 2011	Game and game-dealer licences abolished	NI	2011 Act s35; SR 2011/215
17 August 2011	Close-season sale ban ended; unlawful-game sale offence; venison dealer's licence repealed	NI	2011 Act s36; SR 2011/285
9 October 2025	Lower nitrite limits for cured meat	NI (EU rules)	Reg (EU) 2023/2108
7 June 2027	Warnings required on lead gunshot	NI (EU rules)	Reg (EU) 2026/2530
1 April 2028	Lead bullets restricted at outdoor ranges unless risk-management conditions are met	GB	UK REACH
7 June 2028	Labels required on lead gunshot	NI (EU rules)	Reg (EU) 2026/2530
1 April 2029	Sale and use of lead shot banned; large-calibre lead bullets banned for live quarry	GB	UK REACH
7 December 2033	Lead gunshot banned; bullets not covered	NI (EU rules)	Reg (EU) 2026/2530

Regulation (EU) 2026/2530 of 16 November 2026 amends EU REACH, which applies in NI under the Windsor Framework. Whether the Stormont brake is invoked in the two months after publication (to about mid-January 2027) has not been checked; the entry-into-force date should be confirmed on EUR-Lex.

NI and GB: game, food and lead rule changes

Dates the rules change, 2011 to 2033



Source: 2011 Act; Reg (EU) 2023/2108; Reg (EU) 2026/2530; UK REACH

11. Crow scaring and crow control

Protecting crops and game from crows sits under two different sets of rules: noise law for scaring, and wildlife law for killing. Status as checked on 21 November 2026.

11.1 Scaring is not killing

Scaring birds off a crop needs no licence. Two limits apply. It is an offence under the Wildlife (NI) Order 1985 to intentionally or recklessly disturb a specially protected (Schedule 1) bird at or near its nest, and some methods of taking or killing birds are banned outright (Art 6) (legislation.gov.uk). Scarecrows, kites, flags, lasers and gas guns are scaring, not taking. *Lasers also carry eye-safety and aviation rules, so take advice before using them near roads or flight paths.*

11.2 Gas guns and noise

No NI statute deals with bird scarers as such. Complaints go to the district council as noise. Derry City and Strabane District Council lists agricultural noise, including 'barley bangers' and bird scarers, among the kinds it cannot normally deal with under the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act (NI) 2011 (Derry and Strabane). Councils in GB and the Republic judge scarer complaints against the NFU's Bird Scarers Code of Practice (Fingal County Council; Westmorland and Furness). Its main points: use scarers only where justified, never before sunrise or after sunset, avoid Sundays, site them away from houses and point them away, use baffles such as straw bales, and change the type when birds get used to it. Following the code is how a farmer shows they are using the best practicable means to limit the noise. *Whether any NI council or the UFU has adopted the code, and which NI nuisance provisions and defences a council would apply, has not been checked.*

11.3 Killing crows: the general licences

All wild birds are protected, so crows may be killed only under licence. DAERA issues three general licences each year under Article 18 of the 1985 Order (DAERA):

LICENCE	PURPOSE	SPECIES	LIMITS
TPG1	Public health or safety	Feral pigeon, jackdaw	
TPG2	Preventing disease or serious damage to livestock, feed, crops, fruit, timber or fisheries	Hooded crow, jackdaw, magpie, rook, feral pigeon, woodpigeon	
TPG3	Conserving wild birds	Hooded crow, magpie	1 March to 31 August only

Only an 'authorised person' may act: the owner or occupier, or someone they authorise (TPG/3/2026). Gulls, starlings and house sparrows were removed from the licences after a legal challenge by Wild Justice, which DAERA conceded in 2021 (Leigh Day, 10 Dec 2021). DAERA describes the current licences as interim, pending a consultation. TPG3's 2026 window closed on 31 August 2026; the 2027 licences had not been issued at the time of writing. For rooks and hooded

crows damaging crops, TPG2 is the licence. Carrion crow is not on any of the three; the hooded crow is NI's resident crow, which is likely the reason. *General licences commonly require non-lethal methods to have been tried first and set conditions on traps (such as daily checks of Larsen traps) and record keeping; read each licence before acting. TPG3 does not cover protecting pheasant or partridge: its purpose is conserving wild birds, and game birds are not 'wild birds' in law. Whether reared game birds count as livestock under TPG2 has not been confirmed.*

11.4 Guns and timing

Shooting crows needs a firearm certificate, as for any shooting (section 10). The Sunday and night ban in section 7A of the 1928 Act applies to game, and crows are not game. *But the 2026 general licence TPG3 does not apply on Sundays or between one hour after sunset and one hour before sunrise. The conditions of TPG1 and TPG2 should be read before shooting on a Sunday.* Lead shot may not be used on or over wetlands (section 4.6).

12. Road kill: collecting and using animals killed on the road

Pheasants, rabbits, deer and badgers killed by cars are a common sight. Whether anyone may pick them up, eat them or sell them turns on three separate bodies of law. Status as checked on 21 November 2026.

12.1 Selling or supplying it as food: no

EU food hygiene law, which applies in NI, deals with wild game as animals **hunted** for human consumption (FSA wild game guidance). A road casualty was not hunted, has had no trained-hunter check, and its time of death is unknown. It cannot lawfully go to a shop, restaurant, dealer or game handling establishment, or be supplied under the small local-supply exemption. *This follows from the definition; no FSA statement on road kill specifically has been found.* The British Deer Society advises that no deer found dead, including road kill, should ever enter the food chain or be fed to pets (BDS).

12.2 Eating it yourself

Food hygiene law does not cover food you take for your own household. The risks are real: crushed and bruised meat, bacteria from a ruptured gut, an unknown time of death and possible disease. *No NI or UK official advice specific to eating road kill has been found.*

12.3 Can you take it? Wildlife law

- **Game birds (pheasant, partridge, woodcock, snipe and red grouse):** these are not 'wild birds' under the 1985 Order, so possessing a dead one is not a wildlife offence (Art 2).
- **Wild birds, including ducks, geese and birds of prey:** possessing a dead wild bird is an offence under Article 4(2), but Article 4(3) gives a defence where the bird was not killed or taken unlawfully (Art 4). A genuine road casualty is generally defensible, but the burden is on you, so note where and when it was found.
- **Protected animals in Schedule 5, such as the badger:** possessing a dead one, or any part of it, is an offence under Article 10(2), with similar defences in Article 10(3) (Schedule 5). The Irish hare is not in Schedule 5; it is game.
- **Deer:** removing the carcase of any deer from land without the owner's or occupier's consent or other lawful authority is an offence under Article 22, the poaching provision (Art 22). Leave a dead deer and report it.
- **Rabbits:** no wildlife offence in possessing a road-killed rabbit.

12.4 Can you take it? Ownership

In GB a common saying holds that the driver who kills a pheasant may not take it but the next driver may, from old English game law; trade press also says a dead deer becomes the property of the landowner or sporting tenant (Shooting UK). *Neither has been checked against NI law, and no NI*

statute on road-kill ownership has been found. Going onto private land to collect a carcase without consent is trespass.

12.5 Reporting

- **Dead swans, geese, ducks, gulls, waders or birds of prey:** report through DAERA's dead wild bird reporting tool, and do not touch them (avian influenza surveillance) (DAERA).
- **Livestock or domesticated deer on the road:** report to the PSNI (nidirect).
- **Hitting a wild deer:** there is no legal duty to report it unless someone is hurt or other property is damaged, because the Road Traffic (NI) Order 1981 lists only horses, cattle, asses, mules, hinnies, sheep, pigs, goats and dogs (Art 175). Call the PSNI anyway for an injured deer, so it can be dispatched humanely.
- **Where to report a carcase for removal:** *whether councils or DfI Roads collect dead animals from NI roads, and whether any deer-collision data are published, has not been checked.*

12.6 Skins, feathers and trophies from road kill

Wild animals other than wild game, not suspected of disease, are outside the animal by-products rules (Regulation (EC) 1069/2009, Art 2(2)(a); section 9.3), so a skin, antler or feathers kept from a road casualty raise no by-products issue. The wildlife limits in 12.3 still apply: a dead owl's feathers or a badger skull are covered by the possession offences and their defences.

12.7 In short

No NI offence has been found in picking up a road-killed pheasant or rabbit for your own household, but nothing official says it is safe to eat: it is at your own risk. Do not sell it or give it away, including online, as that may count as placing food on the market. Leave wild ducks, geese, owls and other birds of prey, and badgers, where they lie, and report dead wildfowl and raptors to DAERA. Leave a dead deer: removing it from someone's land without consent can be poaching. Report an injured deer to the PSNI.

13. History and tradition

Almost every deer in NI is here because of a landowner's decision, some of them centuries old. The law grew up around estates and their game; the 2011 reforms were the first to treat game mainly as food and wildlife rather than property.

13.1 Who brought the deer

Red deer may be native or ancient introductions; the Kerry herd descends from animals brought by people over 5,000 years ago, while most other Irish red deer came from Britain and Europe in the 17th and 18th centuries (Carden et al., 2011; Vincent Wildlife Trust). Fallow were brought in by the Anglo-Normans, probably in the 1200s. Sika arrived in 1860, when Viscount Powerscourt bought one stag and three hinds for his Wicklow park. By 1884 he had more than 100 and had sent sika to Castlewellan in County Down and Colebrooke in County Fermanagh (Powerscourt, 1884, via Smith et al., Conservation Genetics; McCurdy). Hybrids with red deer were recorded at Powerscourt in 1884 and at Colebrooke by 1898. Today's Tyrone and Fermanagh sika descend from those estate herds.

13.2 Estates and grouse moors

Irish grouse shooting declined from the mid-20th century as moors were planted, drained and overgrazed. In 2019 the Irish Grouse Conservation Trust ran driven grouse at Glenwherry, reported as the first in Ireland for more than 60 years (The Field, March 2020). *Secondary source.*

13.3 The law: from property to wildlife

The Game Preservation Act (NI) 1928 set close seasons and controlled who could deal in game. The Wildlife (NI) Order 1985 brought deer and wild birds under modern wildlife law. The Wildlife and Natural Environment Act (NI) 2011 abolished game licences and dealers' licences, banned hare coursing and shortened the close season for female deer (section 6.6; legislation.gov.uk). *Pre-1928 Irish game statutes have not been traced for this piece.*

13.4 Blooding

Blooding is the custom of marking a hunter's face with blood from their first kill. It is old in European hunting and stalking, and its defenders describe it as a rite of passage and a mark of respect to the animal (Press and Journal, Jan 2023). It became public news in Britain when Prince Harry described his own blooding at Balmoral in his memoir *Spare* (2023). Its critics are as old: the campaigner Henry Salt and his Humanitarian League attacked blood sports, and the blooding of children, before the First World War, and campaign groups still cite it as evidence that shooting brutalises the young (Protect the Wild). Stalkers' forums show it is still done in the UK, by choice rather than expectation. *All sources here are secondary; Salt's text has not been checked against a primary copy, and no account of blooding specific to Ireland has been found.*

13.5 Eating the raw liver

In some hunting cultures the hunter takes a bite of raw liver or heart from a first deer, at the kill or that night in camp. It is recorded among North American and southern African hunters, and is usually said to come from European custom (American Hunter, 2016). There is a practical root: offal is the first part of a carcase to spoil, so it was eaten first, often by the people who did the work of gralloching (Shooting Times). Today the stalker's liver is usually taken home and fried the same day. Raw, it carries a proven risk of hepatitis E and other infections, and wild liver can hold cadmium (sections 5.6 and 5.7). *Secondary sources; no evidence found of the raw-liver custom in Ireland specifically.*

13.6 Game in Irish food

Venison, game birds, hare and rabbit were estate and country foods. Rabbit was everyday food in rural Ireland until myxomatosis in the 1950s. *Not yet checked against a food-history source.*

14. Welfare and conservation: the case against

This piece argues that a necessary deer cull should become good local food. The case against shooting, especially the shooting of released birds, deserves the same space. It is set out here as its critics would put it, with what the evidence does and does not show.

14.1 Released birds are a numbers business

Pheasant and red-legged partridge are reared in large numbers, released and shot. Critics argue the system treats a wild-looking bird as a product, and point to rearing conditions, birds that die on roads or to predators after release, and the oversupply that leaves some shot birds unwanted (sections 3.3 and 9.9). *No NI figure for birds released, shot or wasted exists to test these points.*

14.2 Predator control

Shoots protect birds by killing foxes and corvids, including under DAERA's general licences (section 11). Campaigners such as Wild Justice have challenged those licences in court; DAERA conceded a challenge in 2021 and cut the species covered (Leigh Day, 10 Dec 2021). Conservation managers counter that predator control helps ground-nesting birds: at Glenwherry, red grouse and Irish hare counts rose under predator control and habitat work (section 2.6). Both points can be true.

14.3 Quarry of conservation concern

Woodcock, snipe, grey partridge and red grouse are all of conservation concern in Ireland, and all have open seasons in NI (section 7.1). Critics ask why species in decline are shot at all. Defenders answer that managed shooting funds the habitat work that keeps them. *Their current status in Birds of Conservation Concern in Ireland should be stated for each species.*

14.4 Lead and scavengers

Lead shot over wetlands is already banned in NI, but lead in game and in gut piles can poison scavenging birds (GB and European evidence; no NI study found) and reaches the plate (section 4.6). NI's EU ban on lead gunshot starts in December 2033, more than four years after GB's.

14.5 Wounding and welfare

Not every shot kills cleanly. Wounded deer need following up, and wounded birds are not always found. *No NI data on wounding rates exists* (section 7.8).

14.6 Disease and release

Released birds can carry and spread disease; avian influenza has already disrupted the egg and chick supply (section 3.4). England licenses releases near protected sites; NI has no equivalent scheme that this piece could find (section 4.5).

14.7 Where that leaves the argument

The case for eating wild venison is strongest where the cull would happen anyway, the meat is used, and lead is not. The case for released-bird shooting is weaker: it depends on releasing animals to shoot, killing predators to protect them, and selling meat the market often does not want. That tension, between the environmental case for a cull and the social and welfare case against shooting for sport, runs through the whole of this piece.

14.8 The female cull

The female deer season opens on 1 November, when that year's calves still depend on their mothers, and runs to 31 March, when hinds and does are heavily pregnant (1985 Order, Sch 10). Stalkers answer that shooting the calf first, and a disciplined cull, keep orphaning down. *No NI data exists either way.*

14.9 Scale, snares and traps

Critics also point to the number of non-native pheasants and red-legged partridges released in GB each year, and to the use of snares and traps on shoots. NI has no count of birds released, and the NI law on snares and traps has not been reviewed for this piece.

15. Opportunities, risks and open questions

The opening for NI is to turn a cull that should happen anyway into a traceable, lead-free, EU-compliant local meat, and to stop wasting skins and birds, while being honest about the case against in section 14.

15.1 Opportunities

1. **Count and report the cull.** A simple NI deer return (species, sex, location) would give the first population signal and back woodland and bTB policy. Low cost if run by DAERA alongside the existing seasons; a voluntary return through BASC NI and the estates could come first.
2. **Shared larders and collection centres.** Use the EU collection-centre rules that apply in NI but not GB to link small stalkers and shoots to an approved establishment (section 6.4). Fits Forest Service land and the estates.
3. **Lead-free by choice, now.** NI is not covered by the GB ban from 2029, and the EU shot ban starts only in 2033. Producers who go lead-free now can answer the FSA advice directly and sell to buyers who ask for it (section 4.6).
4. **Public-sector venison.** Forest Service culls could supply hospital, school and prison catering through an approved establishment. *Procurement rules and volumes have not been checked.*
5. **All-island wild venison.** NI producers can sell small quantities direct into the Republic, and both jurisdictions share the deer. A joint wild Irish venison mark with Food NI and Bord Bia is plausible after the SPS agreement.
6. **Curing and charcuterie.** Air-dried, smoked and cured venison turns a seasonal meat into a year-round product that travels into GB and the EU (section 6).
7. **Skins, feathers and antler.** A small NI micro-tannery, or a supply deal with an existing GB or Irish one, built on traceable skins, plus a collection point for feathers and antler (section 9).

15.2 Risks

- **Data:** no NI census or cull data, so any claim about numbers is weak.
- **Lead:** a food-safety story could hit the whole category before 2033.
- **Disease:** bTB in deer (2.5% of NI deer culled in 2019–2023), chronic wasting disease in Scandinavia, African swine fever in wild boar in Europe, and avian influenza closing shoots.
- **Reputation:** released-bird shooting, predator control and wasted birds attract justified criticism (section 14); the venison case stands or falls on the cull being necessary and the meat being used, not on the shooting of released birds.
- **Rules in flux:** the SPS agreement text and the EU lead restriction are not yet in force.

15.3 What could not be confirmed

These points are open as at 21 November 2026: whether any NI game-handling establishment is currently approved; whether releasing pheasant and red-legged partridge needs an Article 15 licence; whether game

can move from GB to NI under the Retail Movement Scheme; how Regulation (EU) 2026/2530 applies in NI; the Forest Service's deer cull figures; the conservation status of each quarry bird; and the text of the UK–EU SPS agreement as it affects wild game. Updates will be posted on this page.

Annex: Oisín, the Giant Irish deer, and three unusual meats

Two stories about Irish deer, then three meats at the edge of the game trade. Only ostrich is game in law; snake and snails are their own food classes. None is a big market in NI, but each shows how the law sorts unusual animals into food categories.

A.1 Oisín, the little deer

The name Oisín means 'little deer' or 'fawn', from the Old Irish *os*, a deer or stag, with a diminutive ending (Behind the Name). In the Fenian cycle, Oisín's mother Sadhbh was turned into a doe by the druid Fear Doirche. Fionn mac Cumhaill's hounds caught her and would not harm her; she became a woman again and lived with Fionn, until the druid turned her back into a deer and she was lost. Years later Fionn found a boy living wild who had been raised by a deer, recognised him as his son, and named him Oisín. He became the poet and narrator of much of the Fenian cycle, and in a later tale went to Tír na nÓg. *Mythology; versions differ, and the sources here are secondary.* The story is a reminder that the deer has sat close to the centre of Irish culture for well over a thousand years: the hunt, the hounds and the animal that is spared.

A.2 The Giant Irish deer

The Giant Irish deer, often called the Irish elk (*Megaloceros giganteus*), was one of the largest deer that ever lived, with antlers up to about 3.6 metres across. It was not an elk, and not only Irish, but Irish bogs have preserved more of it than anywhere else, notably at Ballybetagh Bog south of Dublin. It lived in Ireland from about 12,000 years ago and was long thought to have died out about 10,600 years ago, probably as the climate turned colder and its food failed (Barnosky, Quaternary Research). Radiocarbon dates from the Isle of Man later showed a population around the northern Irish Sea about 1,400 years after that, roughly 9,200 years ago (Nature, 2000). Elsewhere the species survived longer still. Two skeletons are on display at the National Museum of Ireland (NMI). *Recent archaeology may put the first people in Ireland earlier than Barnosky assumed, so a human role has not been ruled out.*

A.3 Ostrich and other ratites

Ostrich, emu and rhea are 'farmed ratites', which EU food law treats as **farmed game**, not poultry. Their meat is handled under the rules for farmed game in Regulation (EC) 853/2004, Annex III, Section III, which also allows ratites to be slaughtered on the farm with the competent authority's authorisation (legislation.gov.uk). In NI that authorisation comes from the FSA, with a veterinary ante-mortem inspection and a health certificate for each batch (FSA on-farm slaughter guidance, GOV.UK, updated 22 Oct 2026; FSA health certificate).

The UK had an ostrich boom in the mid-1990s, when Parliament was asked repeatedly about slaughter and welfare rules (Hansard, 21 Mar 1996). A 1998 Harper Adams study found the ostrich had been farmed for over 150 years in South Africa, first for feathers and then for hide, with meat a later and growing earner; it judged the UK industry held back by weak markets for meat and

leather and little research under European conditions (Adams and Revell, 1998). The meat is very lean and red. Ostriches are birds, so a keeper in NI must register with DAERA as a bird keeper (section 10). *No current NI ostrich farm has been confirmed, and whether ostriches need a licence under NI dangerous wild animals law has not been checked.*

A.4 Snake meat

Snake meat is legal food in the EU only as **reptile meat**: the edible parts of *farmed* reptiles. The species in the import rules include reticulated python and Burmese python, alongside saltwater crocodile, ocellated lizard and Chinese soft-shelled turtle (DAFM, updated 11 Apr 2025); the legal basis is Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) 2019/625. It can be imported only from Switzerland, Botswana, Vietnam, South Africa or Zimbabwe, from EU-approved plants, with a health certificate, and only where the species is authorised as a novel food if required. Since 2020 it must meet a *Salmonella* food safety criterion (Commission Regulation (EU) 2020/205). EFSA found that snake meat, unlike crocodile or lizard meat, has passed parasites to people (EFSA). These EU rules apply in NI. Ireland has no native snakes, so there is no wild source and no realistic NI production; it is an import and a novelty. *Novel food status for each snake species has not been checked against the Union list.*

A.5 Snails

Edible snails are covered by their own section of EU food law. Regulation (EC) 853/2004 lists *Helix pomatia* (Roman snail), *Helix aspersa* (the common garden snail, now *Cornu aspersum*, sold as petit-gris), *Helix lucorum* and the giant African land snails of the family Achatinidae (853/2004, Annex I, 6.2). Since 28 April 2021 the definition used for imports and official controls also covers any species of the Helicidae, Hygromiidae and Sphincterochilidae families (Delegated Regulation (EU) 2021/573). Rearing snails is primary production under Regulation (EC) 852/2004; killing and processing must take place in an establishment built for it (853/2004, Annex III, Section XI). In the Republic, snail farmers who process must register with the Department of Agriculture's meat hygiene division (Oireachtas, 25 Nov 2021). In GB, the FSA reminded port vets in 2025 that only the listed species may be imported (OVS note 2025/45). The garden snail is common in NI, so a small snail farm is possible here. *No NI snail farm has been identified.*

A.6 Why include them

The law sorts animals by how they are produced, not by what they are: a wild deer is wild game, a park deer is farmed game, an ostrich is farmed game, a python is reptile meat, a snail is its own class. Any NI diversification into these meats starts with that classification.

Sources

All accessed or checked on 21 November 2026 unless dated otherwise.

Legislation

- Game Preservation Act (NI) 1928, s7 and s7A
- Wildlife (NI) Order 1985: Arts 2, 4, 7, 22, 23; Schedules 5, 10, 11; SR 2008/407 (Irish hare)
- Wildlife and Natural Environment Act (NI) 2011; s36; commencement SR 2011/215 and SR 2011/285
- Road Traffic (NI) Order 1981, Art 175
- EU: Regulations 853/2004, 1069/2009 Art 2 and Art 10, 142/2011, 2020/205, 2021/573, 2023/2108, 2026/2530 (OJ copy)

Official guidance and data

- FSA: wild game guidance; lead-shot game; on-farm slaughter; NI approvals policy, March 2025; nitrites explanatory memorandum
- DAERA: wildlife licensing; TPG/3/2026; importing POAO from GB; dead wild bird reporting; deer questions, 2020; DAERA/26-229; Glenwherry; red grouse action plan, 2008; bTB consultation, 3 Sep 2026; third-country exports
- NIEA and PSNI: Wildlife and Game Protection leaflet, Feb 2026
- CAFRE: Glenwherry Hill Regeneration Partnership
- GOV.UK and Defra: lead ammunition response, 31 Jul 2026; UK REACH ranges; certificate 8372; SPS preparation; TSE report 2024–25; BQWV launch; OVS note 2025/45; HMRC trade data
- Ireland: DAFM reptile meat; DAFM treated feathers; Oireachtas 15 Feb 2024 and 25 Nov 2021; safefood, nitrites
- Parliament: Hansard, 22 Jan 2003; Hansard, 21 Mar 1996
- Health: NHS, meat in your diet; NHS, cooking safely; EFSA, reptile meat
- Environment: NatureScot Archive Report 024; Natural England NEER016; Forest Research, 29 May 2026; FAO, deer products; National Museum of Ireland

Peer-reviewed

- Carden et al. 2011, Mammal Review; Smith et al. 2014, Conservation Genetics; Allen et al. 2025, Infection, Genetics and Evolution; Tei et al. 2003, Lancet; J Med Virol 2004; Fiala et al. 2019; Barnosky, Quaternary Research; Nature 2000, giant deer; Arh Hig Rada Toksikol 2014; McCurdy, Irish Forestry; Adams and Revell 1998, Harper Adams

Secondary and trade

- Shooting Times and Shooting UK (2011, 2021, 2023, 2025); The Field (2020); American Hunter (2016); Press and Journal (2023); Protect the Wild; RTÉ; Irish Examiner; Leatherbiz (2024); Leigh

Day (2021)

- Industry and campaign: Deer Industry NZ; Sustainable Food Trust; BASC; Intertek (BQWV); Irish Grey Partridge Conservation Trust; NatureScot genetic scorecard; British Deer Society; Vincent Wildlife Trust; ANSES via FoodNavigator; New Hampshire Fish and Game
- Producers and directories: Baronscourt; NI Good Food; Love British Food; 4NI; Sysco Ireland; Patient.info (nutrition); Behind the Name; council noise pages (Derry and Strabane, Fingal, Westmorland and Furness)

Claims not yet verified

- UK venison imports of about 3,000 tonnes a year (Scottish Venison Association estimate)
- 22.3 kg CO2e per kg carcase for Scottish wild venison (slides only)
- Whether any NI game-handling establishment is currently approved
- Whether releasing pheasant and red-legged partridge needs an Article 15 licence
- Game under the NI Retail Movement Scheme
- Application of Regulation (EU) 2026/2530 in NI (read from the OJ text, not EUR-Lex)
- Henry Salt's writing on blooding (secondary sources only)
- Any claim about wasted or dumped game birds

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