# Euston Estate struggles with rising deer population amid costly culling and weak venison market



The 10,500-acre Euston Estate near Thetford, owned by the Duke of Grafton, is facing significant challenges in managing its rising deer population amid costly culling operations and limited market demand for venison, particularly from Muntjac deer. The estate cultivates a variety of crops including wheat, barley, and sugar beet, alongside extensive woodland and parkland areas that are increasingly affected by deer activity.

Robert Childerhouse, the estate director who assumed his role last year, detailed the difficulties the estate encounters in controlling deer numbers despite ongoing efforts. Over the 12 months leading to 31 March, the estate culled approximately 600 deer, yet this number falls short of the estimated 1,000-plus needed annually to keep the population sustainable. "Deer numbers on the estate are rising despite our best efforts to trim the herds down," he explained.

One of the major concerns is the environmental and agricultural damage caused by deer. A deer survey conducted this spring by the Broads Authority highlighted that deer exert a "critical impact" on fragile regional landscapes as well as on farmed crops. The survey incorporated drone technology to improve the accuracy of deer counts, which are otherwise difficult to conduct.

Muntjac deer pose a particular problem due to their year-round breeding. However, the financial returns from culling them remain low, with carcasses fetching only about £12 to £15 each, given their size of roughly 12 to 15 kilograms. Childerhouse noted the challenges in market demand and costs associated with culling. "The cost to kill it, prepare it for the game dealer and deliver it is more than it's worth," he said. He also mentioned rising ammunition costs and supply difficulties, especially for ammunition sourced from the United States.

The market for venison is limited, with game dealers preferring red, fallow, or roe deer over Muntjac, further reducing the profitability of culling these smaller deer. Childerhouse believes awareness about venison’s nutritional value remains low despite it being "a really healthy lean meat". He suggested that demand for venison should be higher but currently is constrained by consumer knowledge and supply chain issues.

Farmers in other areas of Suffolk echo the concerns about deer. James Foskett of Foskett Farms near Woodbridge described deer as problematic for his vegetable crops, reflecting a wider agricultural challenge in the county.

Efforts to protect crops through fencing are largely unfeasible on Euston Estate due to cost and scale. Childerhouse illustrated the damage caused by large groups of deer, stating, "When you get a herd of 100-plus red deer running through standing cereal crops or vegetables, they can make a huge mess."

The combination of increasing deer presence, economic considerations surrounding culling, and limited venison markets presents an ongoing and complex challenge for large estates and farmers in the region. The Broads Authority survey and the estate’s ongoing management efforts underscore the broader environmental and agricultural impacts of wildlife populations in rural Norfolk and Suffolk.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.broads-authority.gov.uk/looking-after/projects/deer-surveys> - The Broads Authority has conducted deer surveys in the Broads area, highlighting the significant negative effects of deer on fen and woodlands, which are strongly impacted by deer activity.
2. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/380664506_Urban_Deer_Management_Status_within_the_United_States_A_Synthesis_of_State_Wildlife_Agencies%27_Urban_Deer_Management_Resources> - This study discusses the challenges of managing urban deer populations, including the complexities of urban deer management and the need for effective control measures to mitigate conflicts with humans and the environment.
3. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/330311108_Managing_white-tailed_deer_Exurban_suburban_and_urban_environments> - The article examines the conflicts arising from urban deer populations, such as damage to garden vegetation and vehicle collisions, and the degradation of natural landscapes due to over-browsing.
4. <https://www.post-journal.com/opinion/in-our-opinion/2024/03/solutions-to-citys-rising-deer-population-are-simple-but-unpopular/> - This opinion piece highlights the complexities of managing rising urban deer populations, emphasizing the challenges in implementing control measures due to public opposition and the need for consensus among city residents.
5. <https://direct.usagm.gov/record/577092> - The article discusses the surge in deer populations during the COVID-19 pandemic and the challenges in managing these populations, including the decline in venison sales and the need for increased domestic consumption to support culling efforts.
6. <https://www.broads-authority.gov.uk/looking-after/projects/deer-surveys> - The Broads Authority's deer surveys have identified significant negative impacts of deer on fen and woodlands, with high levels of damage observed in almost all fen areas, affecting habitat structure and composition.
7. <https://www.edp24.co.uk/news/25126094.deer-numbers-suffolk-estate-rise-cull-costs-increase/?ref=rss> - Please view link - unable to able to access data