

Deer and Deer Farming in Medieval England

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Abstract

The deer in the parks, chases and forests of medieval England were managed more actively, and with a greater skill and care, than is perhaps generally realized. Their owners derived considerable benefits from them, not only in the opportunity to hunt, which was often subsidiary, but in venison, a high status meat. Though deer were often privileged, deer farming was generally integrated into other agricultural or woodland activities; deer parks, in particular, were often efficiently managed units fulfilling a number of purposes, so much so that we should perhaps be cautious about dismissing them, as is so often done, as no more than status symbols.

DEER parks have had rather a bad press from medieval historians. They have conventionally been seen as 'obvious luxuries: a manifestation of conspicuous consumption'¹ and 'an unprofitable use of land',² If they were abandoned in the later Middle Ages, this was only 'a sensible economy'.³ But are such judgements justified? Or, to put it another way, do they help us to understand the great wave of park creation of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries? I want to argue in this article that, on the whole, they do not. Part of the problem lies in the difficulty of assessing the importance of the deer which the parks were created to protect, and which alone explain their impressive surrounding banks, ditches, and fences (or hedges or walls). We have long been familiar with the concept of parks as 'larders for live meat',⁴ rather than simply seigneurial hunting reserves, but the deer themselves have nevertheless received relatively little

attention.⁵ The problem is partly documentary. For a number of reasons, deer tend to slip through the usual documentary net, so that their importance is easily underestimated. Another difficulty is that parks served many purposes. Domestic animals might graze alongside the deer inside the park, and park woodland provided timber, wood, and other valuable resources, all of which were, in general, increasingly scarce and valuable as the thirteenth century progressed. The creation of a park tended to increase the owner's power over the resources enclosed within it, as the complaints of many ousted commoners testify. From a broader perspective, this should make us cautious about what might be simplistic judgements about the profitability of parks treated in isolation; more particularly it further diverts attention from the deer, so elusive in the documents, and makes it difficult, not to say unrealistic, to try to identify their specific contribution, or cost, to the park economy.

¹ Colin Platt, *Medieval England*, 1978, p 47.

² Paul Stamper, 'Woods and Parks', in G Astill and A Grant, eds, *The Countryside of Medieval England*, Oxford, 1988, p 146.

³ John Hatcher, *Rural Economy and Society in the Duchy of Cornwall 1300-1500*, Cambridge, 1970, p 184, quoted in both Platt, *op cit*, p 47 and Stamper, *op cit*, p 146.

⁴ O G S Crawford described them as 'enclosures for storing live meat in the form of deer and other animals' in his *Archaeology in the Field*, 1953, p 189; the idea also permeates the work of Professor Cantor, and many others.

⁵ Recent conspicuous exceptions which I have found particularly helpful include Oliver Rackham, especially his *Ancient Woodland*, 1980, pp 188-95, where medieval parks are described as essentially 'a utilitarian enterprise producing meat', p 197; E Roberts, 'The bishop of Winchester's deer parks in Hampshire, 1200-1400', *Proceedings of the Hampshire Field Club and Archaeological Society*, XLIV, 1988, pp 67-86; and P Franklin, 'Thornbury woodlands and deer parks; the earls of Gloucester's deer parks', *Transactions of the Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society*, CVII, 1982, pp 149-69.

I

However, evidence about the deer exists, even if it has to be sought across a wide range of documents from different places and sources at different periods, and it is on the deer, the ultimate motive for the parks, that this article concentrates. It is clear that parks could and did support considerable herds, and that their owners could draw on them for supplies of venison on a far from negligible scale. This might be for their own household consumption, in particular at festivals when guests were entertained, or simply to serve as gifts, whose importance should not be underestimated in a society where largess and patronage were crucial attributes of lordship. Parks also provided the opportunity to hunt. How often, in practice, lords chose to hunt in their parks is open to debate; it must have depended on the nature and size of the park, as well as on personal preference, and in any case habits no doubt changed over time. The paucity of evidence for seignorial hunting has surprised some writers on deer parks;⁶ it may simply reflect the fact that it happened less frequently than is sometimes supposed. However that may be, hunting there was, on a regular and systematic basis, but by servants, charged with the task of supplying their employers with deer, alive or dead, as required.

It also needs to be emphasized that it was very far from being a matter of erecting fences round a suitable stretch of ground, discouraging poachers, and leaving the rest to nature. Deer were managed in the Middle Ages, skilfully and intelligently, using methods which showed considerable understanding of the animals' habits and needs. Further, though the management of deer reached its most advanced form inside parks, where it can perhaps justifiably be described as 'deer

farming', it was also practised over a much wider geographical area, in the royal forests and chases. These were institutions with an active deer management policy, and cannot be understood without this point of reference. Indeed, deer management was sufficiently widespread, and on a sufficiently large scale, to be seen as a significant aspect of medieval agriculture. There were some seventy royal forests in medieval England, a large number of chases, or forests in private hands – perhaps as many as there were royal forests – and a far larger number of parks – the number has been put as high as 3000.⁷ Not all these parks were in existence simultaneously, and not all of them necessarily contained deer throughout their existence; and, like the parks, the royal forests and chases were not exclusively devoted to deer. But the fact remains that deer were receiving a degree of protection and management over a very wide area, and the history of medieval deer farming needs to be integrated into the agrarian history of medieval England, rather than seen as an unclassifiable and insignificant aberration.

This is not to claim, of course, that deer farming was simply another branch of agriculture, equivalent to, say, sheep farming. Throughout the Middle Ages, it retained a peculiar and ambivalent status, which is in itself not without interest. It is, for example, noticeably absent from the discussions of agricultural methods, estate management, and accounting in the various treatises devoted to these subjects which were compiled in the Middle Ages, mostly in the thirteenth century.⁸ The exception is the *Husbandry*; it briefly mentions parkers, along with haywards and grangers, when discussing estate officers,

⁶ For example, Roberts, *op cit*, p 70; Hatcher, *op cit*, p 184. A study of seignorial hunting on the basis of historical, as opposed to literary, sources would be very useful.

⁷ M Bazeley, 'The Extent of the English Forest in the Thirteenth Century', *TRHS*, 4th ser, IV, 1921, pp 140–72; Stamper, *op cit*, p 140.

⁸ D Oschinsky, ed, *Walter of Henley and other Treatises on Estate Management and Accounting*, Oxford, 1971.

and includes 'any wild beast' (that is, deer) in a list of creatures for which 'one does not render account', apparently on the grounds that 'many people do not have or raise ... them'.⁹ Though perhaps odd grounds on which to base such advice, this was nevertheless an accurate observation, at least for its time: deer farming was widespread, but at the same time confined to an élite. Deer in the royal forest were reserved for the use of the king; only lords of high rank were able to acquire chases; and the majority of parks, especially the larger and more long-lasting ones, were owned by the wealthier lords.¹⁰ Whether this exclusivity was the real reason for the silence of the treatises seems doubtful. They may have been slow to catch up with techniques still in their infancy at the time they were compiled, though this seems unlikely; it is more probable that there was a certain reticence about discussing deer on a par with mundane creatures such as sheep, cattle, and pigs.

It cannot have been the result of a general unfamiliarity with and ignorance about deer. The extensive medieval literature on hunting includes ample discussion of the animals and their habits – their preferred terrain, their eating habits, their behaviour during the rut, when fawning and so on – which is often clearly based on close and accurate observation. However, the hunting treatises do not envisage the management or farming of deer. The Master of Game comments that 'stags ... do not so often slay each other' in woods as in parks, thus recognizing the existence of parks while recording what may have been an observed consequence of confining deer in a relatively small space. But in general, in hunting literature, the beasts were, indeed had to be, wild

animals for the brave and the skilled to seek out and hunt down.¹¹

No such reticence, however, inhibited estate documents. For example, the so-called Tutbury Cowcher of 1415, a survey of the administrative system of the Honour of Tutbury, then part of the duchy of Lancaster, treats deer management in an absolutely matter-of-fact way. Rules for the care of the deer are prominent in the lists of duties of the officers serving in Needwood and Duffield Frith, the two chases on the estate.¹² And some decades earlier, the Black Prince's Register reveals a great lord concerning himself with the welfare of the deer scattered throughout his estate, as a result constituting a mine of information about deer management.¹³

Deer farming is also peculiar in that, though venison was highly prized, it was not, as a rule, produced for the market. Harrison remarked in his *Description of England* that 'venison ... is neither bought nor sold by the right owner';¹⁴ though made in the sixteenth century, the observation applies equally to the Middle Ages. This is not to say that venison was never sold. According to Fitz Stephen, it was on sale in public cookshops in twelfth-century London, though only accessible to the rich. In the thirteenth century, poachers in the royal forests supplied an active black market in venison, prominent in towns situated nearby or with easy access; we know that venison from the Forest of Dean was smuggled to Bristol and Monmouth from ports along the Severn estuary.¹⁵ But owners of forests, chases, and deer parks seem to have

⁹ Oschinsky, *op cit*, pp 441 and 431–2.

¹⁰ L Cantor, *The English Medieval Landscape*, 1982; for park ownership in Staffordshire, see Jean Birrell, 'The Forest and the Chase in Medieval Staffordshire', *Staffordshire Studies*, III, 1990–1, p 35.

¹¹ See, for example, W A and F Baillie Grohman, ed, *The Master of Game by Edward, 2nd Duke of York: the Oldest English Book on Hunting*, 1909.

¹² British Library, Harleian MS. 568.

¹³ *The Black Prince's Register*, especially vols I, 1346–1348; II, 1351–65 (Cornwall); and III 1351–65 (England).

¹⁴ Quoted in E P Shirley, *Some Account of English Deer Parks*, 1867, p 27.

¹⁵ F M Stenton, *Norman London*, Historical Association Leaflet, 1934, p 28; Jean Birrell, 'Who poached the king's deer', *Midland History*, VII, 1982, p 20.

thought solely in terms of producing deer for their households, or, to quote Harrison again, they gave 'away their flesh, never taking penny for the same'; in which case, of course, the gain consisted rather of the status and prestige such gifts conferred. Deer farming was an aspect of medieval agriculture which was taken seriously but which resisted the commercialization increasingly found elsewhere. There were, of course, strong practical considerations militating against the sale by producers of their venison. Too open a market for it would have encouraged poaching and made the protection of deer within parks, forests, and chases even more difficult on practical, not to say ethical, grounds. However, at a deeper level, and probably more importantly, production of deer for the market would have devalued an important aspect of the aristocratic way of life and privilege.

Deer remained 'wild animals' (*ferae*), to use a common medieval expression, and game. They were not amenable to farming in the same way as the usual domestic livestock. They had to be hunted to be killed; also, they were protected. The right to hunt them was strictly restricted, to the king (or his officers or grantees) in the royal forests, and similarly to the private owners of chases and deer parks.¹⁶ Further, lords were able to enforce measures which privileged the deer as against other potential users of the numerous forest or park resources. Special courts existed to enforce the protection of the deer in forests and chases, though lords of deer parks had to resort to a mixture of bullying and persuasion to exclude others from their parks, and, to their chagrin, to rely on the ordinary courts to prosecute park-breakers. Not every owner of a deer park was as unlucky as the lord of Okeover (Staffs), who lost, by his own account,

100 of the 125 deer in his park to poachers in 1441, but his story is a striking reminder of one of the hazards medieval deer farmers had to face.¹⁷ It is no wonder that the job descriptions for officers in Needwood Chase and Duffield Frith in the Tutbury Cowcher devote almost as much attention to measures against poachers as to measures designed to tend the deer.

The peculiar status held by deer and deer farming is one reason why it is so poorly documented, or, at least, so unevenly documented. Manorial accounts, for example, purport to record expenditure on and income from parks but in practice do so only selectively, only rarely recording either total numbers of deer or the number hunted. Hunting and other associated expenses sometimes appear in manorial accounts, but are often missing or incomplete. On some estates, separate deer accounts were kept, which usually record the number of deer hunted, how they were disposed of, associated costs and so on. Unfortunately, series of such accounts seem rarely to have survived. Inquisitions *post mortem* purport to value parks, but seem not to allow for the deer, except occasionally to blame them for low pasture values. The royal forests are plentifully documented, at least for the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, but most of the records which survive are of judicial proceedings, and only minimally informative about deer management, though they treat poaching at length. Occasionally, documents which are more analogous to estate documents, such as accounts, survive, which are more informative. It is easy to see why deer farming has been neglected, as evidence of it is so often absent from the documents where one might expect to find it, and though some light is shed on it by a wide range of sources, it remains difficult to treat quantitatively. An approach from

¹⁶ G J Turner, ed, *Select Pleas of the Forest*, Selden Society, XIII, 1889, Introduction; C R Young, *The Royal Forests of Medieval England*, Leicester, 1979.

¹⁷ *Collections for a History of Staffordshire*, new series, VII, pp 51-3.

the perspective of household consumption runs into further problems. In particular, household accounts may underestimate consumption of venison, and often seem to be at odds with the evidence of deer bones found on excavated high status sites.¹⁸

II

However, that a range of measures was widely adopted to preserve and encourage deer is not in doubt. These ranged from very specific practices such as providing cows to suckle motherless fawns (documented at Falkland, Scotland, in the late fifteenth century),¹⁹ to very general but basic measures to protect the deer's habitat. The creation of the royal forests, in which not only the venison but the vert, that is the woodland cover, was protected, was, of course, a means to preserve the deer which was rooted in an appreciation of their need for forage and cover. Whilst the woodland of the royal forests was inevitably eroded over time, there was a consistent attempt, in principle at least, to preserve within the larger forest those areas the deer habitually frequented. For example, inquisitions attempted to establish which woods might be felled or which areas assarted to cause them least damage. Customary activities such as pasturing animals, collecting wood and digging turf might be confined to areas where they would not disturb the deer. Thus, one village in Cannock Forest (Staffs) was amerced for digging turf where it was harmful to the deer at an eyre in 1286, and in the mid-fourteenth century the Black Prince was trying to restrict the

areas where local people could dig turf in his Cheshire forests for the same reason.²⁰

More specific measures reflected the need of deer to be left undisturbed at the two crucial periods of fawning (the 'fence month', traditionally the fortnight on either side of Midsummer Day, for fallow and red deer) and the rut (a month or more in autumn). During the fence month especially, other activities which were normally permitted within the forest were restricted or prohibited. Other animals were sometimes excluded, or rights of way through the forest curtailed.²¹ On the estates of the bishop of Durham, special 'watchers' were brought in during both the fence month and the rut to see that the deer were undisturbed.²² The Black Prince required the foresters on fourteenth-century Dartmoor to make lodges and 'stay more continually on the moor... while the does are fawning and the fawns are tender', to protect them from the shepherds who also needed to be on the moor at that season. However, the practice was clearly not new, as foresters were claiming additional expenses at fawning time on Dartmoor in the late thirteenth century.²³ Fawning is notoriously accompanied by high mortality if adequate cover and fodder are lacking, facts which are quite specifically referred to in a fourteenth-century set of chapters of the eyre; it was an offence, it says, to destroy bracken in the royal forest where this was necessary to the does, where, that

¹⁸ Christopher Dyer, 'Documentary Evidence: Problems and Enquiries' and Annie Grant, 'Animal Resources' in Astill and Grant, eds, *op cit*, pp 25 and 165; see also pp 6-7.

¹⁹ *Exchequer Rolls of Scotland*, IV, p 54, quoted in J Cummins, *The Hound and the Hawk*, 1988, p 60.

²⁰ PRO, E.32/188, m.13; J A Green, 'Forests' in *VCH Cheshire*, II, p 175.

²¹ Turner, *op cit*, p xxvi, see also pp 64 and 126; H E Boulton, ed, *The Sherwood Forest Book*, Thoroton Society, Record Series, XXIII, 1964, p 69, cap. 6; G H Tupling, *Economic History of Rossendale*, Manchester, 1927, p 9.

²² *Boldon Book*, Surtees Society, XXV, pp 28-30, quoted by J L Drury, 'Durham Palatinate Forest Law and Administration, specially in Weardale up to 1440', *Archaeologia Aeliana*, 5th series, VI, 1978, p 88.

²³ *Black Prince's Register*, vol II, p 71; L Margaret Midgley, 'Ministers' Accounts of the Earldom of Cornwall 1296-7 II', *Camden Society*, third series, LXVII, 1945, p 220.

is, they 'mostly fawn and are protected with their fawns'.²⁴

The problem which some modern deer farmers have called 'winter death syndrome'²⁵ was well-known to their medieval predecessors. Deer are on the whole able to fend for themselves over the winter, especially where the density is not too high in relation to resources. However, especially in hard winters, some fail to survive due to a mixture of cold and poor nutrition. The concern to ensure adequate natural shelter has already been noted. This was more likely to be a problem in parks, though they normally contained some woodland. However, on some large estates, the natural park cover was supplemented by the provision of sheds.²⁶ The most common medieval answer to the problem of winter starvation was simply to exclude other stock in order to preserve for the deer whatever meagre food was available. The practice was sometimes called the 'winter heyning'. The precise form such measures took varied from place to place. In Durham and the Forest of Dean, there was a general prohibition of other stock from November to April; in Cranborne Chase, the 'heyning' was declared only in unusually hard winters.²⁷ In Needwood and Duffield Frith, it was one of the duties of the officers to see that parks were cleared of other stock 'in time of snow and hard weather'. In practice, here, as in many other parks, the number of other animals allowed was not only tailored to the needs of the deer during the winter, but all year

round; the deer received priority as and when it suited the lord.²⁸

A more positive policy to counteract winter starvation was often adopted. This was occasionally the case in forests; for example, hay was put out for the red deer at Burnhope in Durham.²⁹ However, the practice of providing additional winter feed was especially characteristic of deer parks, where it was also, of course, more necessary, given the more restricted area in which the animals could roam. The practice was widespread and of long standing. Whilst it was in some cases apparently only an emergency measure, in others it was a regular policy. Oats were occasionally provided,³⁰ but the two most common forms of additional winter feed were browsewood and hay, the latter, according to E P Shirley, the nineteenth-century writer on deer parks, 'the most obvious and natural supplement'. It was common practice to reserve the hay of certain meadows in or near parks exclusively for the deer. If this was impracticable, hay was bought. In the case of one of the favoured royal deer parks, Woodstock, hay was bought annually for the deer from the mid-twelfth century, and hay was bought for the deer in Northampton Park from the 1160s.³¹ By the thirteenth century this was common practice, documented throughout England and Scotland.³² The use of mangers or feeding

²⁴ See, for example, Hatcher, *op cit*, p 180.

²⁵ Drury, *op cit*, p 96.

²⁶ Roberts, *op cit*, p 79; Cummins, *op cit*, p 60. A buck at Longdon, a Staffordshire manor of the bishop of Coventry and Lichfield, was apparently being hand-fed oats in the early fourteenth century; it is tempting to speculate that it was a pet, though it was perhaps being fattened for slaughter, Staffs RO, D.1734/J2057 (1311-12). There are other hints of tame deer: a *cervus domesticus* at Gloucester Castle was killed by a poacher in 1231 (*Calendar of Close Rolls 1227-31*, p 537); another was killed in 1285 in the episcopal park of Rose by poachers apparently frustrated by an unsuccessful expedition in Inglewood Forest (F H M Parker, 'Inglewood Forest, part III', *Transactions of the Cumberland and Westmorland Archaeological and Antiquarian Society*, new series, VII, pp 10-11).

²⁷ *Pipe Roll Society*, IX, 1888, 12 Henry I, p 117; *ibid*, XII, 1890, 14 Henry II, p 50; see also J M Steane, 'The Medieval Parks of Northamptonshire', *Northants Past and Present*, V, 1973-7, p 228.

²⁸ For Scotland, see Cummins, *op cit*, p 60.

²⁴ Boulton, ed, *op cit*, p 84, cap. 13. See also pp 64, cap. 9 and 74, cap. 44; also N D G James, *A History of English Forestry*, Oxford, 1981, pp 43, 15.

²⁵ Of the many works devoted to contemporary deer farming, I have found particularly useful P F Fennessy and K R Drew, eds, *Biology of Deer Production*, Bulletin XXII, Royal Society of New Zealand; for 'winter death syndrome', see p 88.

²⁶ Roberts, *op cit*, p 79; there was a 'deer house' in the Belper Ward of Duffield Frith in 1313-14, PRO, DL.29/1/3, and another in Needwood in the 1470s, PRO, DL.29/372/6202.

²⁷ Drury, *op cit*, p 88; James, *op cit*, p 15; D Hawkins, *Cranborne Chase*, 1980, p 27.

troughs, possibly under cover (which would prevent the hay from spoiling) is sometimes recorded, and suggests a systematic and controlled provision, necessary if all the deer are to benefit.³³

Deer browse, cut from either deciduous or evergreen trees, provided a much cheaper winter feed than hay. Shirley quotes a late eighteenth-century keeper to the effect that cutting browsewood saved three tons of hay a year for every hundred deer in the New Forest.³⁴ Evergreens might be cut as needed, or branches of deciduous trees lopped in summer, stacked, and put out during the winter. This practice, too, is widely documented throughout the country and was sometimes on a substantial scale. G H Tupling pointed out that it cost the equivalent of one man working for between two and three months to cut browsewood in early fourteenth-century Rossendale.³⁵ In Woodstock Park in the thirteenth century, labour services were employed to cut ivy and browsewood whenever snow lay two or three days on the ground.³⁶

The excellent series of records for Needwood Chase show the full range of measures employed to maintain the deer population throughout the winter. In the first place, large quantities of browsewood were cut in the chase every year and put out in winter (and later sold off as fuel). In 1417-18, for example, nearly 400 cartloads were cut in three of the four wards of the forest where deer were found. However, the practice could not be maintained on this scale, and during the course of the century, hay was increasingly substituted for browsewood, at some considerable cost. Several acres of meadow

were regularly set aside for the deer (for example, more than seven acres in 1440-1). The hay was stored in the chase - £1 13s 6d was spent on a barn in the forest for hay for the deer in 1440-1; it often had to be carted several miles across the forest, a further expense. Demesne hay was regularly supplemented by local purchases: five cartloads of hay were bought at a total cost of £1 8s in 1440-1. Deer browse continued to be cut, though in reduced quantities; it was much cheaper than hay. It cost the duchy only ½d per cart to cut the 151 cartloads used in 1440-1, a total of 6s 3d. Lastly, a number of pastures within the chases which were normally leased out were reserved to provide extra grazing for the deer.³⁷ This level of winter provision seems to have been entirely typical of Needwood in the fifteenth century, and is indicative of the extent to which its deer population was dependent on human intervention, as well as of the impact of the deer on the economy of the chase.

Though winter presents particular problems, deer are voracious eaters, and need a good supply of suitable food all year round if they are to thrive and reach a good weight. It has been estimated that red deer in contemporary Scotland will eat the equivalent of their own body weight in fresh forage in a ten- to fourteen-day period.³⁸ Grass is an important element in their diet, and most forests and deer parks contained grassy lawns for them to graze. These were carefully preserved, and, if necessary, improved. At Havering in 1261, for example, a herd of cows was moved into the park to eat off the old grass; in the 1350s, the Black Prince had the grassy lawns of two of his Cornish parks, Restormel and Launceston, temporarily ploughed up in an attempt to

³³ 'Ministers' Accounts of the Earldom of Cornwall', p 159 (Oakhams); Hatcher, *op cit*, p 180; R B Turton 'The Honour and Forest of Pickering', *North Riding Record Society*, new series, II, 1895, p 20.

³⁴ Shirley, *op cit*, p 244, note 2.

³⁵ Tupling, *op cit*, p 9.

³⁶ C J Bond, 'Woodstock Park under the Plantagenet kings: Exploitation and use of wood and timber in a medieval deer park', *Arbicultural Journal*, V, 1981, p 205.

³⁷ PRO, DL.29/368/6166; DL.29/369/6179.

³⁸ *Red Deer Management*, HMSO, 1981, p 18.

rid them of moss.³⁹ Deer also need access to fresh water, and considerable effort was put into improving pools and streams to cater for them. For example, a new pool was made in Needwood in 1476–7 at a cost of £4 5s. At Framlingham (Suffolk), additional ponds were dug in the park in dry summers.⁴⁰

III

The level of care afforded the deer inevitably varied considerably, given the wide range of circumstances in which they were found, from large forests to much smaller enclosed deer parks. It is in the former that it is perhaps appropriate to talk of the 'management' of what were clearly still wild animals leading a largely natural life, that is free to roam and able, to a greater or lesser degree, to survive without human intervention, as opposed to the 'farming' characteristic of deer parks. In parks, the deer were enclosed within fences and dependent on the additional care provided, without which they could not have survived, at least in such numbers. Most of our evidence relates to the parks on large estates, which were, in any case, in a majority, but which may have benefited from the greater resources at the disposal of their owners. Certainly, a considerable investment in labour and materials was sometimes made. The bishop of Winchester spent at least £100 on his Hampshire deer parks in 1332–3, though this sum includes nearly £30 on hunting expenses.⁴¹ Hatcher estimated that the duchy of Cornwall was spending well over £20 a year routinely on its six Cornish parks in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, with as much again,

sometimes more, on occasional large-scale projects such as the complete re-hedging of a park or new lodges, and not including the wages of parkers or other officers.⁴² The lodges, though some were extended and elaborated during the course of the Middle Ages, were often originally not so much hunting lodges as bases within the park – or forest – for the officers responsible for the deer, where hay and browse-wood were stacked, and where keepers spent the night in the fence month or kept watch for poachers.⁴³ Similar sums were spent by the duchy of Lancaster on its parks within Needwood Chase in the fifteenth century. Here, too, there was a regular annual expenditure of some £20, with much larger sums – £30, £40 was not uncommon – spent in the case of some occasional major project such as digging a pool or building a hay barn.⁴⁴

The main regular item was always fencing. Deer are notorious for their ability to jump over any fence which is not high enough (the fencing may need to be as high as eight or nine feet, or even higher, depending on the terrain) and discover and squeeze through any weak points; fencing – its material, method of construction and cost – remains a prime preoccupation of modern deer farmers. The considerable length and high cost of medieval timber fencing emerges clearly in Needwood. Hundreds of perches of fence (a mile, a mile-and-a-half, two miles, even more) were repaired or re-erected every year throughout the fifteenth century. Posts, pales, rails, and shores were all of oak, which was supplied from the estate, though it might have to be transported some miles across the chase. 'Short' fencing cost the Duchy 1½d or 2d per perch to erect in the mid fifteenth century, the

³⁹ M K McIntosh, *Autonomy and Community: The Royal Manor of Havering 1200–1500*, Cambridge, 1986, p 18; *Black Prince's Register*, II, pp 27, 136.

⁴⁰ PRO, DL.29/372/6202; John Ridgard, ed, *Medieval Framlingham. Select Documents 1270–1524*, Suffolk Record Society, XXVII, 1985, p 10; see also Roberts, *op cit*, p 79.

⁴¹ Roberts, *op cit*, pp 79–80.

⁴² Hatcher, *op cit*, p 180.

⁴³ It was noted in the account that a lodge built in the Barton Ward of Needwood Chase in 1322 was for the foresters to spend the night in to guard the deer, PRO, DL.29/1146/11.

⁴⁴ Calculated from the fifteenth-century ward accounts, PRO, DL.29/368–372.

rest – the majority – 2½d or 3d. It comes as no surprise that care of the fencing looms large in the duties of the Needwood Chase foresters. The *Compleat Sportsman* in 1718 emphasized that a keeper must 'daily take a turn round his park', which seems to echo the rule laid down for keepers in Needwood in the fifteenth century; one officer had to carry a hatchet and pale pins in a bag, so that any pales which had blown down could be re-erected on the spot. The procedure to be followed when more major repairs were necessary was also laid down, in considerable detail. It was specified, for example, how the line of the pale was to be established, and how, and between whom, the length of 'new work' and 'tying work' was to be agreed.⁴⁵

The contrast between deer parks and forests should not, however, be pushed too far; it is perhaps rather a question of a spectrum of measures found across a very wide range of circumstances, though applied more often and more intensively in parks. Parks, in any case, were often used as one aspect of deer management within a wider context; this was the case with Havering Park within the Forest of Essex and with the ten or so parks within Needwood Chase. The deer population in such parks was maintained at least in part by deer driven or attracted in from the surrounding countryside, and deer leaps, by which deer could enter but not leave an enclosure, were used as an active management technique, opened and shut as desired.⁴⁶ To protect his own deer, the king routinely forbade deer leaps in such private parks as were permitted in or near the royal forest – as did prudent lords of

chases in similar circumstances⁴⁷ – testimony to their effectiveness. It cost 18s. to construct a new deer leap in Rossendale in 1323.⁴⁸ Its size is not recorded, but a deer leap constructed in the bishop of Durham's Craik Park in 1229, and another at Long Biggin (Northants) in 1321, were both twenty feet long.⁴⁹ Sometimes, they were dispensed with, and the enclosure simply broken, legally or illegally, to allow the deer to pass. Breaks were made in the pale of Hatfield Park in the thirteenth century and labour services employed to drive deer through.⁵⁰ An enterprising local lord who had constructed an illegal park in Feckenham Forest in the late fifteenth century laid a trail of hay near to five breaks in the pale to encourage deer to enter.⁵¹ Steps were also taken to keep up the deer population of unenclosed forests, and men employed to drive deer back into them. In Rossendale, 'moor drivers' were hired for the thirty-one weeks from Michaelmas to May, the period when the deer were likely to stray down from the forest in search of food.⁵²

Parks were also often initially stocked, or periodically re-stocked, with deer brought from outside. The king, with the vast area of royal forest to draw on, was obviously best placed to supply deer for this purpose, and a good proportion of the large number of royal gifts of deer made in the thirteenth century were of this type. Scores of deer, mostly bucks and does, less often harts and hinds, were granted live to favoured deer park owners every year. It seems that the animals were caught in nets and transported in carts,

⁴⁵ The *Compleat Sportsman* is quoted in Shirley, *op cit*, p 231. For useful discussions of park fencing, see L S Cantor and J S Moore, 'The Medieval Parks of the Earls of Stafford at Madeley', *North Staffordshire Journal of Field Studies*, III, 1963, p 42 and Rackham, *op cit*, pp 191–2.

⁴⁶ CCR 1254–6, p 325. Deer leaps, says a recent work discussing deer farming, 'are only just beginning to be recognised as an effective aid to fence maintenance and reduction of damage', R Prior, *Trees and Deer*, 1983, p 39.

⁴⁷ The countess of Warwick, for example, objected in 1247 to a deer leap constructed by Philip Marmion of Tamworth in his park at Middleton within Sutton Chase, *SHC*, IV, 1883, p 107.

⁴⁸ Tupling, *op cit*, p 16.

⁴⁹ CCR 1227–31, p 261; Steane, *op cit*, (gazetteer).

⁵⁰ Oliver Rackham, *The Last Forest. The Story of Hatfield Forest*, 1989, p 54.

⁵¹ R H Hilton, ed, 'Swanimote Rolls of Feckenham Forest', *Worcestershire Historical Society*, 1960, p 40.

⁵² Tupling, *op cit*, p 10.

often over quite long distances. Peas and milk were fed to a deer and two fawns being transported from Islip to Denham in the 1340s. We do not know how many animals survived their journeys, but that the practice continued throughout the century suggests that it had some success. It is further testimony to the skill of medieval deer farmers in handling their animals.⁵³

IV

At some stage it began to be seen as desirable to keep records of numbers of deer, which would today be seen as an essential management tool. This was being attempted in a fairly rudimentary form in the royal forest of Cannock early in the thirteenth century. The officers and knights responsible for viewing the forest in 1235 reported on the number of deer in each of the different sectors or woods within the forest⁵⁴; they were content, however, to make very general statements as to numbers, resorting to phrases as vague as 'a reasonable number'. A century later (1337), the duchy of Cornwall was able to make precise estimates of the number of deer in each of six Cornish parks, in some cases contrasting the actual with the potential number, which suggests that there counting was already an established practice.⁵⁵ By the early fifteenth century, the officers in Needwood Chase and Duffield Frith were required to make an annual census of the deer in the two chases, and the Cowcher laid down some rules as to the conduct of the task; in particular, the count was to be carried out

in March, when cover is still low and the deer relatively stable, still the recommended time today.

Elsewhere, though we have no evidence that a count of the total number of deer was attempted, officers were required to report regularly on the number of deer taken. For example, detailed records were kept of the deer hunted in the royal forests, and when, where and by whom, and these were occasionally incorporated into thirteenth-century eyre rolls.⁵⁶ More comprehensive recording seems gradually to have developed. In the forest of Pickering, for example, in the early fourteenth century, not only was the number of deer taken by the various keepers and others on orders or with permission recorded, plus the number given in tithe, but also the number of deer found dead of murrain.⁵⁷ Such record-keeping became common during the fifteenth century; in Sutton Chase by the end of the century, for example, the keepers accounted for deer 'killed this season', that is, deer poached, hunted on orders, or found dead of disease, all carefully distinguished as to type, age, and sex with the locations specified.⁵⁸

According to an old practice, carcasses of deer found dead in the forest were hung from trees; the duty to hang stags dead of murrain on a certain forked tree (gallows?) was attached to a thirteenth-century serjeanty in Exmoor, and the practice is documented in other forests in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.⁵⁹ This may have been regarded as a precaution against the spread of disease,

⁵³ D Farmer, 'Marketing the Produce of the Countryside' in Edward Miller, ed., *The Agrarian History of England and Wales*, III, Cambridge, 1991, p 387. For 'stress and postcapture myopathy' as a factor in contemporary deer farming, see Fennessy and Drew, *op cit*, especially pp 65 ff.

⁵⁴ PRO, C47/11/123. 'The need to count' is still being urged on deer farmers in Scotland (*Red Deer Management*, p 37).

⁵⁵ P L Hull, ed., *The Caption of Seisin of the Duchy of Cornwall (1337)*, Devon and Cornwall Record Society, new series, XVII, 1971, pp 2 and 24.

⁵⁶ For example, for the Forest of Dean in 1282, PRO, E.32/30, ff 16-16d.

⁵⁷ Turton, *op cit*, pp 121-5 and 130-140.

⁵⁸ A D Watkins, 'Society and Economy in the Northern Part of the Forest of Arden, Warwickshire, 1350-1540', unpublished PhD thesis, Birmingham University, 1989, and Middleton Collection, University of Nottingham Library, MiM. 134/17 (I am grateful to Dr Watkins for lending me his xerox of this document); Hilton, ed., *op cit*, pp 47-50; W R Fisher, *The Forest of Essex*, 1887, pp 217-19.

⁵⁹ E T MacDermot, *A History of the Forest of Exmoor*, 1911, reprinted, 1973, p 28; see also Turner, *op cit*, p 109; Turton, *op cit*, p 132.

although it was perhaps also at least in part a practice designed to keep a check on officials. Perhaps more helpfully from the point of view of preventing the spread of infection, diseased carcasses were sometimes removed or burnt. The king issued orders for the removal of putrid carcasses of deer (and pigs) from Havering Park in 1251, for example.⁶⁰ According to the Tutbury Cowcher, deer dead of murrain in Needwood or Duffield Frith must be burned. The imprecise catch-all term 'murrain' continued to be widely used throughout the fifteenth century and different types of disease were not distinguished, at least in the documents, until the sixteenth century. A document drawn up in 1515 at Framlingham distinguishes the *wyppys*, the *garget* and, more comprehensibly, the *rotte* amongst causes of death.⁶¹ But an awareness of all the principal causes of deer mortality – disease, exposure, starvation, mortality immediately after birth – was apparent at an earlier date.

V

The point has already been made that forests, chases and parks existed both to provide their owners with an opportunity to hunt and a supply of venison. In practice, there was often no rigid line between these two aspects. On many estates we can observe both regular hunting by servants and occasional and sporadic forays (sometimes very sporadic, perhaps every few years, or even less frequently) for sport by the lord, his guests or other privileged persons, and this was probably the normal pattern. But whatever the frequency of the seigneurial hunt, servants hunted on a regular basis, and the organized and routine nature of this activity needs to be emphasized. Some

large estates employed permanent huntsmen;⁶² others took on a huntsman for the season. For example, the bishop of Salisbury employed a huntsman, page, and fewerer (the servant responsible for greyhounds) for the period October–February 1406–7.⁶³ Miscellaneous hunting expenses can often be traced, sometimes tucked inconspicuously away in the expenses section of a manorial account, sometimes recorded in separate deer accounts.⁶⁴ Larders, too, were often employed on a seasonal basis to butcher and salt the meat. For example, a larder was employed at Tutbury for five weeks in 1370–1 at a daily wage of 1½d.⁶⁵ The meat might then be packed into barrels to be despatched to distant households – venison from Cornwall was shipped to the duke of Cornwall in London in 1347⁶⁶ – or stored locally. There were seventeen carcasses in the larder at Tutbury at Michaelmas 1313, thirty-one at the end of the year.⁶⁷

The huntsmen concentrated on the larger red and fallow deer, rather than the roe, and observed two hunting seasons. Harts and bucks were mainly caught in the summer months preceding the autumn rut, when they were 'in grease', that is carrying most venison and fat in preparation for the rut and the winter. The season usually began in June, though male deer were sometimes hunted earlier, and usually ended on 14 September, some-

⁶⁰ Rackham, *op cit*, 1980, p 193.

⁶¹ This document is printed as Appendix II, pp 260–5, in Cummins, *op cit*, p 63. See also Rackham, *op cit*, 1980, p 193.

⁶² Roberts, *op cit*, p 72. For the royal huntsmen, see Cummins, *op cit*, pp 183–4 and F Barlow, *William Rufus*, 1983, pp 124–7.

⁶³ C M Woolgar, ed, *Household Accounts from Medieval England*, Part 1, British Academy, Records of Social and Economic History, ns 17, 1992, pp 416–7.

⁶⁴ For example in the Master-Forester of Needwood's Deer Account, PRO, DL. 29/1/3, and in the reeve's account for Petworth, in L F Salzman, ed, *Ministers' Accounts of the Manor of Petworth 1347–1353*, Sussex Record Society, LV, 1955, pp 37, 51.

⁶⁵ He used three quarters of salt on twenty-four carcasses, PRO, SC.6/988/14, which seems to have been the norm on this estate. Rather more salt was used at Petworth, Salzman, ed, *op cit*, pp 37, 51; see also the late fourteenth-century French hunting account printed in Cummins, *op cit*, Appendix 1, p 255, where 2 bushels of salt per hart was the rate.

⁶⁶ *Black Prince's Register*, I, p 92.

⁶⁷ PRO, DL.29/1/3.

times a little later. For example, when, (in a letter dated 12 September 1238), the king ordered a number of stags and bucks to be caught in various parks and forests, the hunt was conditional on there being enough time left 'before Michaelmas in the due season'.⁶⁸ Hinds and does were mostly taken from late November to early or mid-February, though again the season was sometimes, in practice, stretched a little at either end.⁶⁹

Lords frequently specified in advance what deer were to be taken and how they were to be disposed of. However, it was also often left to the local officers and huntsmen to determine the number that could reasonably be hunted. The Black Prince adopted both policies on occasion. Whilst he issued frequent orders for a specified number of deer to be hunted for particular purposes, he also sometimes ordered a more general cull at the appropriate time of year. For example, in August 1347, the constable and parker of Berkhamstead were ordered to take 'this season's grease' in the park, 'as shall seem best for the prince's profit', have it 'well prepared', and claim their expenses.⁷⁰

So a body of farming practice and management existed which was widespread and which seems to have developed further as the Middle Ages progressed; it involved considerable labour and investment as well as a range of skills and a knowledge of deer. It is hard, at this state of our knowledge, to be precise about its chronology. Some of the techniques described above are documented for the mid- or late twelfth century, whilst others

are first mentioned – to my knowledge – at a later date; they may, of course, be older. We know of the existence of a handful of deer parks by the time of Domesday Book, but almost nothing about how they were managed.⁷¹ Deer parks were being created throughout the twelfth century, though the majority of medieval parks date from the following century.⁷² They are often associated with fallow deer, introduced by the Normans soon after the Conquest, which spread rapidly, and were thought to be more biddable and suited to parks than the native red and roe deer, though red deer were – and are – kept in deer parks.⁷³ The systematic management and even farming of deer probably went hand in hand with the increasing importance of the park deer population, and the need to husband deer within the shrinking royal forests.

VI

How 'successful' was medieval deer farming? How many deer were there in the parks, chases and forests, and on what scale was the 'harvest' of venison? It is difficult to generalize usefully about numbers of deer in forests and parks, not only because figures are hard to come by, but because the number of deer inevitably varied not only over time but depending on the terrain and on the nature and volume of other competing activities. However, we can point to some figures which make plain that quite large herds of deer could be supported within parks and chases. For example, the duchy of Cornwall had 887 deer in six parks in 1337; this included two parks with only very small populations (of 15 and 42), and

⁶⁸ CCR 1237–42, p 102. See also J C Cox, *The Royal Forests of England*, 1905, p 47; Fisher gives Holy Rood Day (25 September) as the close of the season in Essex, *op cit*, p 221. In Bernwood Forest, hunting was to cease on 28 September in 1265 (CCR 1264–8, p 72). See also P A Stamper, 'The Medieval Forest of Pamber, Hampshire', *Landscape History*, V, 1983, p 48.

⁶⁹ The season was usually regarded as lasting from Martinmas (11 November) to 2 February, but Fisher quotes 25 September–14 February. The roe buck, according to the *Master of Game* 'has no season to be hunted, for they bear no venison', p 42.

⁷⁰ *Black Prince's Register*, I, p 117.

⁷¹ Rackham, *op cit*, 1980, pp 188–91; see also Della Hooke, 'Pre-Conquest Woodland: its Distribution and Usage', *Ag Hist Rev*, XXXVII, 1989, pp 126–9.

⁷² Cantor, *op cit*, pp 76–7.

⁷³ In contemporary New Zealand, red deer are regarded as more suitable park beasts than fallow, Fennessey and Drew, eds, *op cit*, especially p 295.

two – Restormel and Launceston – with populations of 300 and 200 deer respectively.⁷⁴ The bishop of Durham had 540 deer in his four main parks in 1457.⁷⁵ Dr McIntosh has estimated that Havering, an unusually large royal park of well over a thousand acres, had a herd of some 500 deer in the fourteenth century.⁷⁶ Most parks were smaller than Havering, often much smaller, and probably normally contained fewer deer. The herd of 125 deer in Okeover Park in the mid-fifteenth century, referred to above, was perhaps more typical. Allegations of the theft or slaughter of deer give us at least minimum figures for some seigneurial parks. Of course, the plaintiffs may well have exaggerated their losses, but the figures had to have some local credibility, and so deserve some credence. For example, the knightly lord of Colton (Staffs) claimed that 140 deer had been poached from his park in 1378; some 80 deer were said to have been taken from another Staffordshire park, Heley, property of the baronial family of Audley, in 1322; it was alleged that 82 deer had been stolen from the duke of Buckingham's park of Redleaf at Pen-shurst in 1451.⁷⁷ It seems reasonable to assume much larger deer populations in forests and chases. Records of several hundred deer found dead of murrain in royal forests in epidemic years certainly imply large total populations; it was claimed that 350 deer died in Sherwood in 1286, 560 in Melksham and Pewsham over three years in the 1480s, as many as 2200 in Clarendon in 1470.⁷⁸

The figures we have hardly lend themselves to generalizations about trends over time, but a few tentative remarks may be made. It seems likely that the deer popu-

lation of the royal forests diminished during the thirteenth century, principally because their habitat was, overall, being steadily reduced. Certainly, royal grants of deer were fewer towards the end of the century, and royal huntsmen were not always able to take as many deer as they had been instructed. At this period, parks must have helped preserve the deer population. Later in the Middle Ages, when pressure on land was less, and old arable often reverted to pasture, some parks were enlarged, and park ownership seems to have extended further down the social scale.⁷⁹ On the other hand, some parks, perhaps never really viable, were abandoned. The royal forests were reduced to a shadow of their former glory, largely broken up and disafforested. The fates of old deer preserves differed, depending on what other possibilities offered in changed circumstances. In Needwood Chase, with its fine grassland and timber, the deer parks and deer farming, integrated into a wider pastoral economy, flourished in the later Middle Ages. In Sutton Chase, the deer survived, but perhaps concentrated into two chief surviving wooded areas.⁸⁰ No general pattern can be detected. Overall, the deer population may have increased.

It is also difficult to generalize usefully about how many deer, or how much venison, lords of parks, chases and forests took on a regular basis. However, a useful approach is to quote a few figures from different types of terrain in order to give some idea of the scale of consumption, and in so doing show how productive well-managed parks and chases could be. Firstly, some reliable figures survive for the two chases of Needwood and Duffield Frith at several points in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. A deer account for 1313–14 tells us that ninety deer were

⁷⁴ Hatcher, *op cit*, p 179.

⁷⁵ Drury, *op cit*, p 97.

⁷⁶ McIntosh, *op cit*, p 18.

⁷⁷ SHC, XIV, part 1, p 146; *ibid*, IX, p 99; R Virgoe, 'Some Ancient Indictments in the King's Bench referring to Kent 1450–1452', *Kent Records*, XVIII, 1964, pp 254–5.

⁷⁸ James, *op cit*, p 39; Cox, *op cit*, pp 28–9.

⁷⁹ Christopher Dyer, 'The West Midlands' in Miller, ed, *op cit*, p 236.

⁸⁰ Birrell, *op cit*, 1991, p 46.

hunted in Needwood that year, and eighty-seven in Duffield. Forty deer were taken in Needwood in 1370-1.⁸¹ In 1434, Tutbury Priory noted that it had received twenty-four deer from Needwood and twenty from Duffield Frith in tithe, suggesting that the very high total of 440 deer had been taken in the two chases that year. This was exceptional; the note goes on to say that the priory usually got only twelve, thirteen, or sixteen in tithe (apparently from Needwood alone), figures which still suggest a substantial regular cull.⁸² These figures make no allowance for deer taken illegally or for deer hunted by licence. On the one hand, we know that poaching in the chase was persistent, though not on what scale; on the other, we know of privileges such as that granted to one longstanding officer to take six bucks in summer and six does in winter annually in Needwood Chase in the mid-fourteenth century.⁸³

Some indications of the sort of yield to be expected from other chases survive. The bishop of Coventry and Lichfield consumed twenty-four deer from his Staffordshire estate (mostly from Cannock Chase) during four months spent at Lichfield in 1461.⁸⁴ It is particularly unfortunate that we are so ill-informed about the yield in deer from the duchy of Cornwall, especially since we know how many deer its Cornish parks contained in the mid-fourteenth century. However we do know that the Black Prince ordered forty does from his Cornish parks in 1351; if we assume, not unreasonably, that a similar number of bucks was taken, we can conclude that he may have got some eighty deer from these parks overall annually, compared with the total park population of 887 deer.⁸⁵ Interestingly, a fairly similar

ratio between total number and annual cull is suggested for Havering Park, where the figure of forty-four deer a year hunted compares with an estimated herd size of about 500. Of course, the average smaller deer park would yield fewer deer; twenty-one deer were hunted in the Petworth park belonging to Sir Henry Percy in 1348-9, which we may perhaps regard as more typical.⁸⁶

We also have a quite a lot of figures for deer production in the royal forests. Rackham has calculated that the king was getting an average of 607 deer a year from all the royal forests and parks together in the middle years of the thirteenth century.⁸⁷ A count using the same methods, that is of the one-off gifts of deer, alive or dead, recorded in the Calendar of Close Rolls, suggests that these were peak years, and that fewer deer were given annually earlier – in the region of 300 a year in the period 1227-31 (over 2000 beasts), and even fewer later, 181 a year in the period 1273-86 (2358 deer).⁸⁸ Similar calculations have been made for individual forests. For example, Paul Stamper has calculated that the king received 140 deer from the relatively small forest of Pamber in the decade 1260-70, but fewer in the earlier and later decades.⁸⁹ The fairly large but relatively remote forests of Cannock and Kinver (Staffs) provided something like 260 and 180 beasts for the king in gifts in the thirteenth century, mostly in the period 1220-1300, and a minimum of a further 140 and 200 deer for the royal household.⁹⁰ However, these figures probably underestimate the total numbers of deer hunted in the royal forests, for example under-recording both the num-

⁸¹ PRO, DL.29/1/3; SC.6/986/14.

⁸² SHC, fourth series, IV, p 257.

⁸³ SHC, 1911, p 357; for other venison or hunting privileges in Needwood, see the Tutbury Cowcher.

⁸⁴ SRO, D1734/3/3/264.

⁸⁵ *Black Prince's Register*, II, p 15.

⁸⁶ Midgeley, *op cit*, pp 37 and 43.

⁸⁷ Rackham, *op cit*, 1980, p 181.

⁸⁸ See also Jean Birrell, 'La chasse et la forêt en Angleterre médiévale' in André Chastel, ed, *Le Château, La Chasse et La Forêt*, Les Cahiers de Commarque, Luçon, 1990, pp 74-5.

⁸⁹ Stamper, *op cit*, 1983, p 48, though he believes the enrolment to be incomplete for the later period.

⁹⁰ Birrell, *op cit*, 1991, pp 27-8.

ber of deer hunted for the royal households and concessionary hunting by privileged locals and officers, not to speak of beasts poached.

In any case, medieval deer farmers were not so much concerned to maximize the production of venison as to ensure that they had enough for their needs as they perceived them, whether for household consumption, for gifts, or for hunting for sport. A nice example of how a very modest quantity of venison could have a quite disproportionate value comes from the household accounts of the bishop of Salisbury. Between November 1406 and March 1407, 21 carcasses of venison, some salted, some 'recent', were consumed; not a very large number, but the four occasions when they were served were the Feast of All Saints, Easter, Christmas, and the New Year, all meals at which guests were entertained.⁹¹ The venison here was clearly more than just another sort of meat, but part of a certain level and type of hospitality, a way of showing honour to guests. Interestingly in this context, the description of the Cornish parks of the duchy of Cornwall drawn up in 1337 includes the comment that in four of the six parks the number of deer, with the season's fawns, was 'sufficient'.⁹² Nor would it necessarily have been wise to have greatly increased densities of deer in medieval parks. On the one hand, this would have increased the animals' vulnerability to disease and malnutrition; on the other, a lower density would bring benefits in greater carcass weight and probably also fecundity.⁹³

⁹¹ Woolgar, *op cit*; see also Christopher Dyer, *Standards of Living in the Later Middle Ages*, Cambridge, 1989, pp 60-1.

⁹² Hull, *op cit*, p 141.

⁹³ 'Most deer populations appear to respond to increasing density by a reduction in fecundity and an increase in mortality' according to R Putnam *The Natural History of Deer*, 1988, p 169.

VII

Lastly, in the light of this, should we be content to see parks simply as status symbols, and examples of conspicuous consumption? It seems to me that this is not so much wrong as inadequate, and as a result potentially misleading. First, it does not allow for the wide range of activities found in parks and chases, a full study of which would go well beyond the scope of this article. However, it should be emphasized that part of the skill of medieval deer farmers lay in their ability to integrate deer farming into a wider context. They had the power to privilege the deer, and often did so, but in practice a sort of balance was struck between often conflicting interests. This might change over time and was not everywhere the same, but parks did not so much lock land up in an unprofitable way as allow lords to exercise a degree of choice and control over the use of the land and resources within them. If, with the interests of the deer primarily in mind, parks helped preserve woodland and pastures in the thirteenth century, this was perhaps no bad thing, hard though it was on those who coveted the land for arable, or found their access to pastures and woods curtailed or ended. Secondly, to dismiss parks as status symbols encourages us to neglect the wide range of skills developed and practised by medieval deer farmers; and it even underestimates the real benefits deer parks brought to their owners, not just in the prestige and status automatically conferred by possession, but in the form of the venison which they could consume themselves, offer to guests at table, or give away.