

WITH THE FAWNS IN JUNE.

BY ALEX. INKSON M'CONNOCHIE.

PERHAPS the second object of the Club, particularly that division dealing with animals, has received too little attention in the *Journal*; if so this chapter will be excused. Few, if any, of our members have not repeatedly seen red deer at close quarters, but it is not given to many to have an intimate acquaintance with the future "monarchs of the glens" so early as the first few days of their lives. June is the month of fawns, and, as it happens, we have had many opportunities of coming across recently dropped calves. Some years ago several Deeside forest owners, particularly the late King, the Duke of Fife, and the late Sir Allan Mackenzie of Glenmuick, made deer parks a speciality, recruiting them by fawns. These fawns were captured in the open when two or three days old, hand-reared for two or three months at the stalkers' or crofters' cottages, and then sent to the parks for breeding purposes. Thanks to Sir Allan Mackenzie we had repeated opportunities of joining in June stalks—a sport which we have found quite as interesting as stalking stags in autumn or hinds in winter. Donald Cameron of Glenmuick is our *beau idéal* of a stalker. Stalking fawns in June seems delightfully simple in theory, in practice it is quite another matter. Fawns are exceedingly weak at birth, and so spend the most of the first few days in resting and sleeping, while the mother seeks milk-producing food at some distance. It is often asserted that hinds hide their fawns immediately after calving; it is not so, however. The calf is generally dropped in the heather, with which its colour so harmonises that it is practically invisible at a distance of even a dozen yards. The white spots on the back aid in the concealment; these are regarded by many naturalists as protective, for after two or three months, when the

occasion for them ceases, they quite disappear. The stalker and the writer made an early start for the first capture of the season, the alarm being set for three o'clock. We had a walk of several miles up the glen before taking to the high ground, and the air was keen. When an altitude of about 1750 feet above sea level had been reached, Donald reconnoitred. To us Lochnagar and Ben Avon were the most prominent objects in the landscape, but his eyes dwelt on two lateral parallel glens opposite Inschnabobart, both having much excellent pasture. Look as best we could, we saw nothing of particular note in them; it was only with the help of the glass and minute directions that the prospect suddenly riveted our attention. These two little valleys literally swarmed with deer, yet without the telescope only a trained eye could detect any sign of life, so well did the colours of the animals blend with their surroundings. Yet even with the glass we could not at first pick out fawns, but with some coaching they too could be distinguished. Taking careful note of the situation, we descended from our perch of observation, using such cover as could be found. Thus we made our way to the side of the glen opposite the two fawns we intended to "bag," and there had to remain motionless for over an hour, till such time as the hinds should leave their youngsters. Ultimately the dappled little beauties made short bolts, looking (we are told) for suitable beds; these found, down they dropped, and the mothers trotted off to fresh pastures. Great care was necessary in our final approach so that sight might be kept of the fawns' positions, for only the tail of the one and the white of the ears of the other were visible. On our part it was simply a case of following the stalker, first down hill, then across a burn, and up the corresponding slope on the other side. We drew up within a dozen yards of our quarry, but where were the fawns? Answered in a whisper, we looked and looked, but could see nothing—at last, however, we recognised the spots of a baby deer, curled up and apparently unconscious of our presence. The time for action was come; Donald threw

his jacket over the fawn and it was a prisoner. Though it trembled all over at first, it made not the least attempt to escape. Into the game bag it went, where in ten minutes it received a companion.

Hinds generally meet their calves three times a day—say 5 to 7 a.m., noon to 2 p.m., and 7 to 9 p.m. We accordingly returned for the evening milking, the sun setting and the moon rising as we lay down on our “spying ground”. Again there was no lack of deer, but mostly in the glen on the right, for the morning’s disturbance had not been quite forgotten. Soon we again had two hinds with their fawns under observation, the light striking on them while we were in shadow as we raced downhill. A flat reached, other tactics were necessary, for now we were in full view of the hinds, so crawling over recently burned heather had to be endured for about 400 yards. Our two hinds were still nearly a quarter of a mile off; we particularly watched one whose calf could apparently not get enough milk. Again and again it would leave off, but always returned to the barmecidal feast. When it finally gave up it moved away, first in one direction then in another, ultimately nestling in the heather. Its head kept bobbing up and down for some minutes, and when it did snuggle down the mother made off. The telescopes were now returned to their cases and we advanced—and a fawn was caught and at once released, for it was a stag. Number two was at once secured without any difficulty as it was asleep, but, alas, it was also of the wrong sex. And thus ended our first day at deer-stalking without a rifle.

Armed with a whole-plate camera we set out in June of 1909 to photograph fawns in Glen Muick. Despite all our experience we should have been helpless without our guide, for the picking out at the distance of perhaps a mile and a half of a hind with a calf in her company is no easy matter for the amateur. The monotonous cry of the curlew was the only sound that broke the intense stillness till the wind veered, and then were heard the musical run of the burn in the distance and the

barking of a collie at Inschnabobart. The higher mountains, with many patches of snow, suggested that winter was not far gone, though our glen seemed under summery conditions. Loch Muick shone like silver, when suddenly we observed that a storm was at hand.

When it cleared away we saw on our left a herd of at least sixty hinds; not much use of troubling with them for possible fawns, for hinds do not drop their calves in such circumstances, nor do they seek society during the first four or five days of their youngsters' lives. At last a hind with a fawn was seen; the latter lay down, and so we had hopes of a close interview. But up the fawn got and gave chase to its mother—it was hungry—and we had seen enough to know that we need not look more in that direction, the fawn being too old to permit of any approach. As we lay motionless in the heather, a hind on the sky-line, away to the left, attracted Donald's attention; he declared she must have a calf near by. We made towards her, and by and by the head of a fawn could be seen at the foot of a heather bank. We passed in front as carelessly as possible, then rounded to get to closer quarters, but the fawn would have none of us. It was too old for our purpose. Later a herd of at least one hundred hinds came into view, all disappearing in a few minutes, except three who stood on the watch. Two of these presently followed in the direction of their friends, but the third slowly proceeded downhill in front of us. Her movements were provokingly deliberate, so the conclusion was irresistible that she had a calf lower down. As we fully anticipated we came on it by the burn-side—at first we thought it was asleep, but its eyes were wide open; it hoped we did not see it! The natural position for a picture was all that could be desired. Ultimately it made off in the direction of its mother. The wail of a golden plover accompanied us as we descended towards the Muick; the road reached, the cuckoo could be heard in the King's woods.

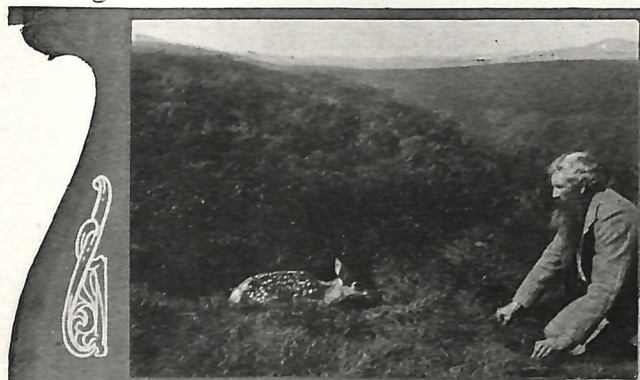
A very early start was made the following morning. The birches were particularly fragrant, for the previous

night's rain had let free their perfumes, and hagberries were in full bloom. Nor could we help admiring the great patches of the graceful oak ferns, brilliantly green, by the river-side. As we walked up by a tributary stream hind was observed whose leisurely steps were enough for Donald. Presently she thrust her nose into the heather, when up started a fawn. After breakfast, it took a short walk with its mother, then fell behind, selecting a bed for itself. Donald concluded that this calf was very young—otherwise it would not have required its mother to rouse it—and, therefore, would not likely run away from us! So when the hind had put half a mile behind her, we advanced, and there was a tiny mite of a stag waiting us. Evidently only a day old, it permitted any liberty, and when finally set down on the spot where we had found it, declined to budge. Afar off, the mother anxiously watched our proceedings, and as we went down the glen quickly rejoined her darling, doubtless much relieved to find that no ill had befallen it. But, alas, when we returned to town, our first attempt at forest photography was found to be an utter failure.

Determined to succeed, we tried a handy quarter-plate camera in Glen Muick last June. It was a glorious morning when we were called to breakfast at four o'clock, and as we drove three miles up the glen early rising had its reward. In the general stillness the cries of cuckoos and curlews had a certain weirdness—one wondered when these birds took rest. There was a dirty brown snow wreath on the Cuidhe Crom of Lochnagar, but the mackerel clouds and mares' tails were reassuring. Our first spying point commanded the most of a lateral glen, and so was ideal, but there we had to remain two hours. The distant prospect was magnificent, for Beinn a' Bhuid and Ben Avon were streaked and scalloped with snow; the nearer view was to us positively entrancing, for we could only lay down the telescope when the eyes ached with its steady use. We soon had several likely hinds under observation; prolonged spying indicated the existence of a fawn. Not that it was seen for some time,

but while it sucked its dam on the far side she turned her head round as though to lick her youngster. We waited, and the fawn revealed itself, following the hind with feeble steps, so we were certain that it was only two days old. Then we heard another fawn calling on its mother—but nothing came of these and other observations, for by ten minutes past six all the hinds and fawns we had located had disappeared over the sky line. Yet just an hour after we had begun (at 5.20) our spy, the upper part of the hill slopes were literally swarming with deer, hinds in parcels of from half a dozen to fifty, all feeding in one direction—uphill. One stray stag was seen; for some considerable time nothing but his horns, in velvet of course, was visible. At 7.25, when we glassed the ground from a new position, a plan of action was settled. As we set out for the east side of the glen with the view of getting on to the ridge of Sguabach, the smell of deer was very pronounced, though by no means unpleasant. Donald also saw a shadow disappearing; that was all, but it sufficed for him—hence our forward movement. It was, he was confident, that of a fawn that had sunk to rest in the heather as its mother had left it. When we reached the higher ground (2000 feet) it was very bare and smooth; that a fawn could lodge there seemed to be out of the question, yet there the dappled calf was stretched out in a little hollow not six inches deep, so safe from observation that when we took our eyes off after a long look at fifteen yards' distance we could not pick it up again without help. It allowed us to approach it closely—we were careful to avoid hurried movements—staring with its big pleading eyes the while, and doubtless wondering what manner of monsters it had to face. We spent a couple of plates on it as it lay perfectly motionless, the short young heather (the ground had recently been burned) overtopped by tiny blaeberry bushes. (Somehow or other these plates were failures). Then Donald gently lifted the little fawn and placed it as seen in (1); then followed (2) and several other poses. As we were preparing to take its portrait standing, it bolted and we saw it no more. Had our pre-

(1)



(2)



(3)

(4)

Photos A. I. M'Connachie.

FAWNS IN GLENMUICK AND ABERNETHY.

ceptor and fellow clubman, McIntyre, been there, results would not have been so meagre.

Later that month we resolved to visit Abernethy forest with a view of securing a few more fawn photographs. A fresh covering of snow was to be seen on the summits of the Cairngorms when we arrived on the evening of the 26th June, and many hinds could be observed from the road between Rebhoan and Rynettin. The following morning opened inauspiciously; mist clung to the mountains, there was more than a suspicion of rain, and moreover the barometer fell persistently. The forester, Alexander Carr, is well known to many of our members; as a deerstalker he is in the front rank—his appearance and movements when on the hill are suggestive of the hunters immortalised by Fenimore Cooper. Thus we were again in luck for a guide, and had scarcely left the cottage when hinds were in evidence. When the Rebhoan road was left and the rough moorland entered, a knoll was made our spying point. The first look all around with the glass revealed nothing remarkable, save three gray-hens down below in the Middle Dam. Moving further forward we had another spy, first picking out a single hind, then a parcel with last year's calves. This parcel, after some glassing, was seen to include a hind with a fawn, so the telescope was kept steady, hoping that by and by the hind would leave her calf in search of fresh pasture, on which we should of course advance. The deer fed upwards; however widely spread they were, they all made for the higher ground, so very young calves could not follow them far. Our particular fawn would have lain down at an early stage, but its mother did not seem to favour that course, for some time at least. Then somehow or other a signal must have been given, and the little creature made for a fallen fir, the bleached trunk of which was half buried. It disappeared beneath it as the hind moved forward, and then not a deer was to be seen. The telescopes were now closed, and we moved on.

The stalker stopped a few yards short of the bleached fir, but even then it took the writer some time to pick out

the fawn. Certainly it was a little beastie, beautiful as it lay at full length, flattened out as it were, with the idea that it was concealing itself from us. It was an excellent "sitter," and (3) was the result. Then Alasdair took it in his arms, with the view of placing it on the heather for our fourth illustration (4), on which at first it squealed most pitifully for its mother, and she answered the call by trotting up along with her offspring of last year. When placed however on the heather, as in (4), it was quite nonchalant, and, as may be seen, even turned away its head. Then it stood up enquiringly and another good plate was secured, after which we set out for a second fawn not far off. Within twenty minutes a revolution of feeling must have taken place, as the next incident shews. As we were moving off Alasdair heard a peculiar sound and looked back. Calling on us—we happened to be leading, no forest craft being then required—we were astonished to see the recently photographed fawn standing by his side, but lost no time in preparations, as may be seen from (5). It was with no little difficulty that we succeeded in getting away without its company.

A few minutes afterwards we saw a hind with a fawn; she lay down beside it. As we advanced slowly she got up and ran off, and the fawn, in its unreasoning fear, made towards us instead of taking another direction. As we foresaw, it fell into a morass and was of course unable to extricate itself. It was tenderly lifted out, but could scarcely stand—it was not twelve hours old—and looked so comical with its hind legs set as far apart as possible in its efforts to balance itself. After expending a plate on it (another failure!) we removed it to safer ground, and made haste to leave the coast clear for the mother's reappearance. We could not help contrasting the utter helplessness of stags for the first day or two of their lives with the graceful movements of the antlered monarchs of the forest, which give such pleasure to all who have the good fortune to see them.



(5)

Photo A. I. M'Connochie.

AN ABERNETHY FAWN.

(Same as (3) and (4)).