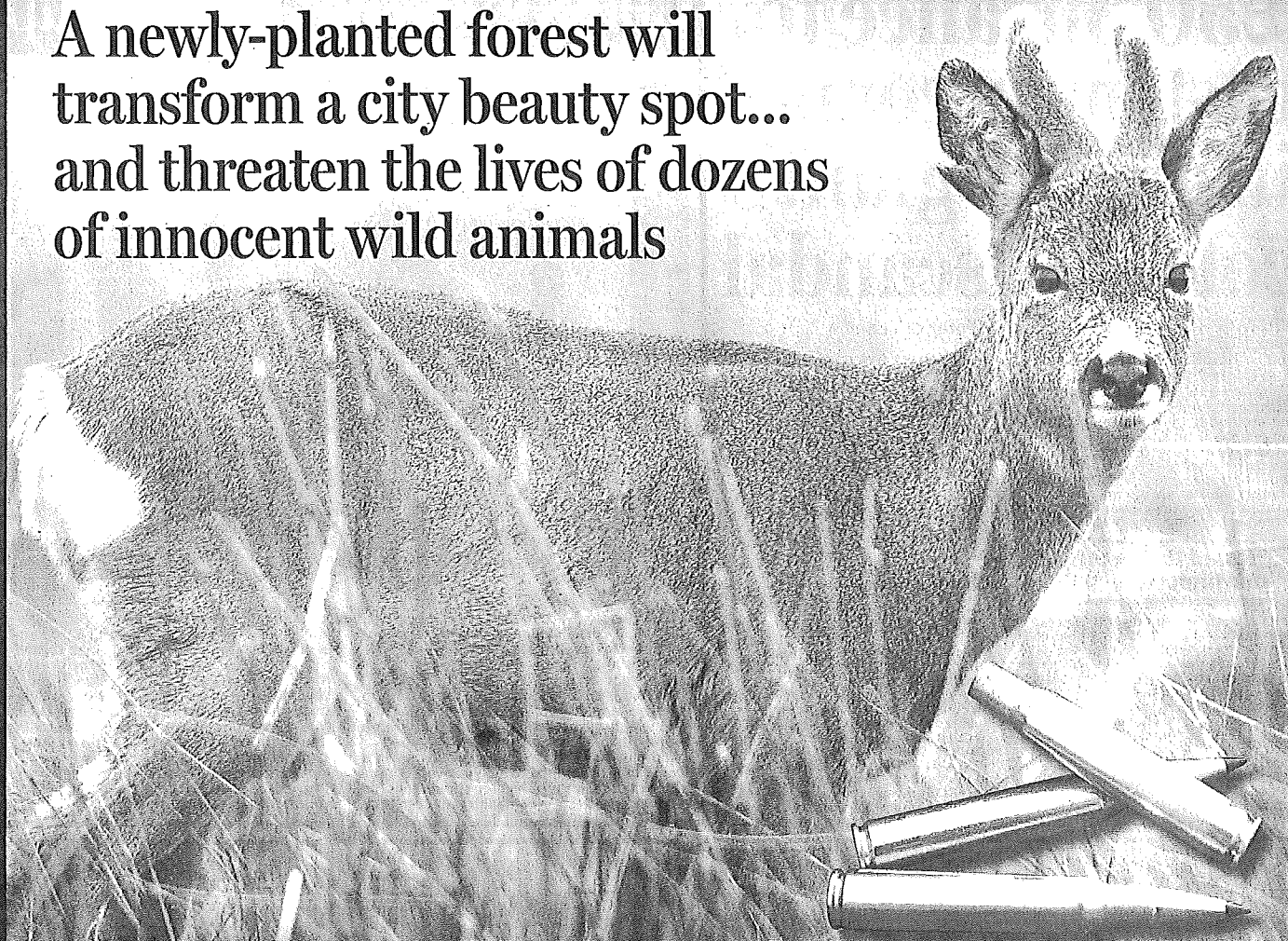


A newly-planted forest will transform a city beauty spot... and threaten the lives of dozens of innocent wild animals



# Should this deer die to save trees?

24 of the 29 deer and spraying the site with weedkiller for the next three years. Smaller trees, such as hazel and rowan, and shrubs are destined for the former landfill in the hope they will stand up longer.

The council's own ranger, armed with a high-powered rifle, will be asked to despatch the deer and, while no date has been set for the first killings, the public unease is palpable.

The council stresses that if the 'deer management operative' is confronted by protesters, he will withdraw and report any incidents to the local police.

The spokesman added: 'The council recognises the right of the public to protest, as long as the method of protest is appropriate and does not compromise public or the operative's safety, and does not prevent the operative from carrying

out their legitimate duty and fulfilling the council's legal responsibilities.'

Yet not everyone in the council recognises the cull as legitimate. Neil Cooney, veteran Labour councillor for the city council's Kincorth and Loirston ward which covers Tullos Hill, said: 'I believe this cull is all about money and politics.'

'This Tree For Every Citizen plan was an electioneering slogan five years ago and they clearly decided it would go ahead, by hook or by crook.'

'But what people are saying in the street is: "If it means killing deer, then don't plant a tree for me." The council was planning to get schoolchildren involved in planting the saplings but young children are becoming quite upset about this.'

'There are four community councils who have come out strongly against this. The hill has always

been a place for ramblers and it has outstanding views of the entire city of Aberdeen. Nobody wants that view spoilt by trees. They tried trees in the past and it didn't work. The

**'Some people are able to feed the animals by hand'**

natural habitat worked against it. Part of the hill was used as landfill and contains a lot of plastics and so on, so the soil is not in a good condition to support trees.'

'The area has regenerated itself into grassland, which supports its own biodiversity with wildflowers which attract bees and butterflies

in the summer. People like the habitat that's there, and they like the deer. Some people have apparently been able to feed some of the animals by hand and there are stories of a blind deer up there being escorted round by its mates.'

Mr Cooney is unimpressed by suggestions that 'thinning out' the number of deer in the short term will improve the herd in the long term. He said: 'Deer are territorial animals but, if deer numbers fall, new deer will move into the area.'

'So far, deer numbers on Tullos Hill have been pretty stable but, once you start culling them, it will never stop, because new deer will move in.'

When the cull was first mooted at a housing and environment committee meeting last year, the council said the deer could only be saved if protesters raised the £225,000 for fences to protect tree saplings from

being eaten. But animal rights groups accused the council of moral blackmail and refused to back fundraising efforts. In the end, just £51 towards the fences was raised.

But Mrs Kelly insists that did not mean nobody cared about the deer. The true test will come when the ranger arrives to fix his sights on them.

'Everyone is talking about how terrible it is that the deer are going to be killed because of some trees no one wants,' said Mrs Kelly.

'I think the politicians don't realise just how strong the feeling is against the cull. But they will find out at the ballot box.'

'In the meantime, when the ranger gets here, whenever that is, we will be waiting for him and we will do everything in our power to save those deer.'

The battle for Tullos Hill has only just begun.