

# The future fortunes of Grey Partridge in Scotland

By Dr Dave Parish,  
Head of Lowland Research Scotland, Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust

We are all familiar with the plight of the Grey Partridge. This iconic farmland bird has declined spectacularly across Europe, most recently due to the pressures created by changing agricultural policy which have pushed farmers towards ever increasing productivity, all too often at the expense of biodiversity. In this case the prime mover has been the loss of invertebrate food supplies upon

which Grey Partridge chicks are so dependent, as reliance on herbicide and insecticide use has increased. Add to that the pressure from increasing generalist predators and losses of nesting habitat and the result is that today we have just a few percent of the population of the 1960s, and many times less again than that at the turn of the 20th Century when around two million birds were sustainably

shot annually in the UK. But what of the future? Surely if this continues we will soon see the last of the Grey Partridge?

The Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust has been researching the needs of the Grey Partridge for many decades, so fortunately much is already known of their ecology and importantly of practical ways in which land managers can already help them. For

example, back in the 1980s, GWCT under the auspices of the late Dick Potts, developed the 'beetle bank' and 'conservation headland' concepts. Both are relatively simple measures to increase invertebrate supplies in the landscape. Beetle banks specifically support beasts over the winter months by providing cover for them, whilst conservation headlands were a novel way of managing the edges

Courtesy of Peter Thompson



Grey Partridge

of cereal fields, spraying them selectively to encourage a few weeds and the insects that rely on them. The implementation of the latter measure alone has been shown to increase chick survival rates to pre-pesticide levels and both of these tools are now available in Scottish (and UK) agri-environment schemes.

Of course, very often alongside such habitat measures, the work of gamekeepers in reducing predation rates that the birds face is also vital. This is always controversial but there is no question that it works. In some rare situations it is possible that it may not be necessary, but where generalist predators like foxes, crows, stoats and rats are abundant, it may be the single most important action that can be taken.

But if these practices have been around for so long, why are we not witnessing resurgent Grey Partridge populations? We haven't quite cracked this problem yet. We know from the results submitted by participants in the GWCT's Partridge Count Scheme that numbers can increase locally when management effort targets Grey Partridge. There are even a handful of sites where Grey Partridge are sufficiently well managed that they can be sustainably shot, like Arundel in Sussex and, as of last year, Whitburgh Farms in Midlothian. But all the people involved are Grey Partridge enthusiasts who go above and beyond to support this species. Elsewhere

the various agri-environment schemes don't seem to be having a positive effect on the wider population.

There are a number of likely explanations for this: the options available within schemes are often not easy to implement (providing a vibrant cover crop, for example, of several plant species in the same plot at the same time, is not easy!) and the choice of options available might not 'join up' and complement each other. Also, there is the issue of scale, so one farmer who has created a haven for Grey Partridge will have little wider impact if all his neighbours are doing nothing.

A new project being led by GWCT aims to improve agri-environment schemes across much of Europe by demonstrating what can be done. The PARTRIDGE project, part-funded by the EU North Sea Region programme, is working on ten demonstration sites with two each in Scotland, England, Germany, the Netherlands and Belgium. Each is striving to convert 7% of the arable area into quality habitat: the level thought necessary to support stable or increasing populations into the future, along with the provision of feeders in winter and reducing predation pressure on nesting birds wherever possible. One of the sites in Scotland is Whitburgh and representatives of the project partners and steering group visited in early May.

One of the major innovations being tried across



## The graft continues

By Alex Stiddart, Director, SACS

For SACS, 2016 and 2017 were demanding, particularly in UK-wide firearms licensing support. But 2018's workload is much broader, with SACS contributing to even more important initiatives. SACS is a truly effective UK-wide shooting and fieldsports advocacy body, punching well above our staff size.

With growing anti-shooting and anti-fieldsports sentiment, firearms and wildlife law proposals, licensing difficulties, GP issues, spurious wildlife allegations and European and UK parliaments attempting to create further restrictions, SACS takes a robust stand. Our remit on behalf of members is extensive, but always highly professional and positive in attitude. We proactively build on positives, rather than ineffectually waving around half empty glasses. The SACS approach to shooting and fieldsports advocacy is different.

Our current workload includes: support for our angling clubs; Wild Fisheries advocacy and partnership work with other bodies; ensuring SNH General Licences for bird control are effective and easy to follow (the new format is based on a SACS proposal); proposed licensing of grouse shoots; support and membership of British Game Alliance, a new UK game meat marketing board; Scotland Good Food legislative bill; the ongoing challenge against Lynx reintroduction.

Plus: Moorland Forum partnership work on moorland management and best practice; active membership of the Working for Waders project to reverse the decline of breeding

wader populations; party political lobbying including hunting with dogs, firearms legislation, afforestation and wildfowling; Natural Resource Wales shooting on public land consultation – relevant and positive in regard to Scotland as well; feral pig management; beavers; Scottish Rural Parliament engagement.

And: Shooting Rates guidance and support for members (no other shooting organisation has worked as hard on this issue for its members); working with partners on a Mounted Hunt Code of Practice for Scotland and continuing the fight against further restrictions on the use of dogs for mammal control; corvid and mammal trapping matters; wild deer matters, incl. membership of deer panels/groups and positive meetings with Forestry Commission on greater local and visitor access to affordable stalking; land reform, incl. engagement with Scottish Land Commission.

Not forgetting the huge range of firearms matters we cover from licensing, GP issues incl. non-compliance and fees, proposed changes to laws, improving police service and opposing airgun licensing in E&W. As well as working with our partners on the British Shooting Sports Council, SACS also effectively represents its members on national and regional firearms licensing working groups.

Proactive, positive-minded and competent, our member representation is truly UK-wide. A big thank you to members for their fantastic support. Without you, none of this important work happens.

Best wishes from Alex, Jules, Pip, Fraser, Karen, Neil, Clive and Tex the Terrier.



Mr Alastair Salvesen, owner of Whitburgh Farms, discussing habitat management in one of the blocks of Partridge cover crop, alongside a Beetle Bank

Courtesy GWCT



all PARTRIDGE demonstration sites is a new cover crop consisting of many different plant species, designed to provide year-round resources – insects for young birds, cover from predators and winter food. Importantly, it is also relatively simple to grow and manage as it forms a long-term cover which only requires partial cutting each year, with resowing of patches if needed to replace some components. This mix varies slightly from country-to-country to suit local conditions, and each country faces its own challenges in producing successful plots. As mentioned previously, producing some of these conservation habitats is not always easy. For example, in Scotland there seems to be a much heavier weed burden that needs to be dealt with so the crop is not choked out. Many of the continental visitors to Whitburgh – who do not seem to have the same problems – were surprised that the farm



Grey Partridge in their natural background

Call us for a free trial!

01505 850042



You are the best in your field,  
so you deserve the best from ours.

- ⊕ Long-term & short-term hire
- ⊕ Free trials and consultations
- ⊕ Customer after care packages
- ⊕ Accessories & other equipment
- ⊕ Body worn CCTV & EPOS systems
- ⊕ Fixed price repairs and maintenance



@ enquiries@gdsradios.co.uk www.gdsradios.co.uk  
Unit 7, 3 Bowerwalls Place, G78 1BF, Barrhead

All About Deer  
[WWW.MORAYOUTFITTING.CO.UK](http://WWW.MORAYOUTFITTING.CO.UK)  
StalkingSchool



Deer Management Training specialising in DSC1 & 2 courses at our facility or delivered at your location

Full RFD services, including full bespoke stalking rifle packages with personalised set-up.

CAIRNGORMS  
NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY  
UGHDARRAS PAIRC NAISEANTA A'  
MHONAIH RUAIH

Approved Training Providers for the Cairngorm National Park Authority, we are dedicated to providing a professional, open and friendly service – 'run by stalkers, for stalkers'

Contact John Allan  
info@morayoutfitting.co.uk  
07833 535060

manager relies on glyphosate (a general-purpose herbicide, unpopular on the continent) to help prepare the ground and control weeds, notably docks and thistles, without which the crop would not thrive.

Mr Alastair Salvesen, the owner at Whitburgh, commented: "It seems surprising to us that several of our visitors were so against glyphosate, a product that we find so important when farming in this northern clime, whether it is to kill the crop and make it ripen just before harvest, or just to control significant and persistent weeds of many types."

Early results from the demo sites are promising and hopefully upcoming agri-environment schemes will be more effective. Perhaps this will help more sites across Scotland to reach the point where Grey Partridge can be shot sustainably into the future, with the multiple associated knock-on benefits for other farmland wildlife.



Strolling for food!



# MULE PRO-DX

## TARGET GREATNESS

Durable and reliable, the MULE Pro-DX is the utility vehicle of choice for many professionals. The three-cylinder diesel engine guarantees the torque needed to carry loads and crew reliably, keeping you on top of your game hour after hour.

For more information or to find your local dealer visit [www.kawasaki.co.uk](http://www.kawasaki.co.uk)

## Kawasaki