

Grey Partridge Action Plan

Current Status

The grey partridge was originally a bird of temperate steppe grasslands. It adapted readily to open arable landscapes and accordingly vastly expanded its range as agricultural development spread west across Europe over the last eight millennia. After the last Ice Age, the grey partridge naturally colonised Britain.

Populations were probably fairly stable until the 18th and 19th centuries, when land enclosure, increased cultivation and intensive predator control by gamekeepers increased numbers significantly. In the early part of the 20th century, it is estimated that there may have been more than one million pairs of grey partridges breeding in the UK.

The intensification of agriculture and the decrease in numbers of gamekeepers from the 1950s to the present day has resulted in a massive decline. It is now thought that there may be as few as 75,000 pairs in the UK, mostly found in the arable lowlands of the east. In Scotland, their breeding range contracted by 25% from 1968 to 1991.

The current status of grey partridge in the Falkirk Council Area is unknown. However, populations are thought to be low. Grey partridge are principally associated with arable and mixed farming, which in the Falkirk Council Area occurs mainly to the north of the Forth & Clyde canal. They may also be found in some areas of the Slamannan Plateau where cereals, root or fodder crops are grown for livestock.

Ecology

The grey partridge is a bird of open arable or mixed farmland. It is easily distinguished by its rusty-red head and outer tail feathers (visible only in flight). Its breast feathers are a mottled grey, while the upper wings and back are brown. Grey partridge spend most of their time (including roosting) in pairs or families (coveys) and on the ground. When disturbed, they take flight creating a loud wing noise and “pik . . . pik . . . pik” call. Their normal call, most frequently heard at dawn or dusk, is a metallic and creaking, “kierr-ik . . . kierr-ik”.

SPECIES PROFILE



David Jones

Common name: Grey Partridge
Scientific name: *Perdix perdix*
Status: Priority

Protection:
Protected under the Wildlife & Countryside Act (1981), the Game Act: close season from 1st February to 31st August, Annex III/I of the EC Birds Directive and Appendix III of the Bern Convention.

Associated Habitat and Species Action Plans

Habitats:
Arable (including cereal field margins)

Grassland (including neutral grassland and dry, acidic grassland)

Boundary features

Birds pair up in January and February and nest from late April to mid July. Nests are simple shallow scrapes, most often sited amongst tussocky grasses in field margins, the base of hedges and in set-aside. Clutch sizes vary between 5 and 15 eggs.

On hatching, grey partridge chicks are reliant on protein-rich invertebrates such as sawflies *Symphyla spp.* for rapid body and feather growth. Thereafter, grey partridge feed on the ground on seeds, grain, leafy growth and invertebrates.

Current Factors Affecting the Species

The three main causes of the decline in grey partridge numbers are thought to be:

- Increased use of herbicides in crops, stubbles and field margins.

This eliminates the broad-leaved plants, which are a food source for the invertebrates which in turn feed grey partridge chicks. From the early 1950s to the 1980s, the total number of invertebrates available to grey partridge chicks within cereal fields had fallen by 75%. The survival rate for chicks was therefore compromised.

- Loss or deterioration of boundary feature habitats.

Due to the intensification of agriculture as a result of national and European policies, field margins and hedges were removed in an effort to increase the area of productive land and accommodate larger farm machinery. However, this is thought not to have been such a significant issue in the Falkirk Council Area as elsewhere in the UK and shifting attitudes and declining farm incomes currently deter such actions.

- Increased predation of nests, chicks and adult birds due to fewer gamekeepers on the ground to control crows, magpies, foxes and other vermin.

Other contributory factors are likely to be:

- Reduction in mixed farming and rotation of cereal crops with other land covers, such as grass leys and fallow ground.
- Change to winter sowing/autumn ploughing and the consequent loss of winter stubbles. Undersown cereal crops are particularly important for overwintering sawflies.

Current Action and Opportunities

Opportunities for habitat management exist under SEERAD's agri-environment schemes. The Rural Stewardship Scheme has prescriptions for grass margins and beetle banks, conservation headlands, unharvested crops, extensive cropping and hedgerows, all of which can enhance breeding and feeding habitats for grey partridge.

Set-aside can also be managed to create a variety of habitats to meet the needs of different species, including grey partridge. A mixture of rotational, non-rotational and wild bird cover with some large open areas and some strips next to field margins is ideal (minimum 20 metres wide or 10 metres if next to a permanent watercourse, with a minimum plot size of 0.3 hectares).

Management guidance is available from advisory groups such as the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG), Game Conservancy Trust, Scottish Agricultural College (SAC) and other groups and individuals.

The Game Conservancy Trust is currently running an Annual Partridge Count Scheme to establish populations and distributions of grey partridge so that conservation action may be more effectively targeted.

The Game Conservancy Trust estimate that Stirlingshire (Clackmannanshire, Falkirk and Stirling) require 814 pairs of grey partridge to contribute to the national target of 150,000 pairs set within the UK Grey partridge action plan.

Objectives and Targets

Objective 1

Halt any further decline in the current breeding population and distribution of grey partridge.

Target 1.1

- Undertake spring and autumn counts of grey partridge to establish and monitor the current breeding population and distribution, annually from 2004.

Target 1.2

- Identify core grey partridge areas and target conservation action at these areas.

Target 1.3

- Increase the awareness of farmers and shooters of good management practices for grey partridge by promoting good practice through advisory visits, farm walks, talks and literature. Ongoing.

Objective 2

Increase the breeding population of grey partridge to 200 pairs, by 2010.

Target 2.1

- Undertake spring and autumn counts of grey partridge to establish and monitor the current breeding population and distribution, annually from 2004.

Target 2.2

- Identify core grey partridge areas and target conservation action at these areas.

Target 2.3

- Increase the awareness of farmers and shooters of good management practices for grey partridge by promoting good practice through advisory visits, farm walks, talks and literature. Ongoing.

Action	Potential Deliverers		Year to be completed or in place						Meets objective
	Lead	Partners	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2012	
A. Policy and Legislation									
1. Promote and develop prescriptions in agri-environment schemes to tackle factors causing loss or decline of grey partridge.	SEERAD	FWAG, GCT, RSPB, SAC	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	1,2
2. Retain and improve set-aside legislation (or incorporate set-aside measures into agri-environment programme).	SEERAD	FWAG, GCT, RSPB, SAC	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	1,2
3. Promote and develop integrated farm management and organic farming techniques.	SEERAD	GCT, LEAF, SAC	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	1,2
B. Site Safeguard and Management									
1. Investigate potential conservation action to be taken locally, including sources of funding.	FGAG			✓					1,2
2. Target any conservation action (identified in B1) to core grey partridge areas identified under action E5.	FGAG	FWAG, GCT, RSPB, SAC		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	1,2
C. Species Management and Protection									
1. Encourage a voluntary ban on shooting grey partridge until positive habitat management has increased numbers to a sustainable level (minimum of 20 birds/100 hectares in the autumn).	GCT	BASC, FWAG, RSPB, SAC	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	1,2
D. Advisory									
1. Provide advice to farmers/landowners on principles of good farm practice, particularly in relation to the use of pesticides.	FWAG, SAC	GCT, RSPB, SEPA	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	1,2
2. Provide advice to farmers/landowners on positive habitat management and relevant sources of grant aid.	FWAG, GCT, SAC	RSPB	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	1,2
3. Provide advice to farmers/landowners and shooters on feeding practices and predator control.	GCT	BASC	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	1,2
4. Provide support for GCT advisory and promotional work locally.	FGAG			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	1,2
E. Research and Monitoring									
1. Carry out local historical review of grey partridge records.	SOC	CARSE, BTO, RSPB		✓					1,2
2. Where grey partridge may be present, increase the number of squares monitored by Winter Farmland Bird or Breeding Bird surveys.	BTO	RSPB, SOC	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	1,2
3. Encourage landowner participation in the Game Conservancy Trust's Annual Partridge Count Scheme.	GCT	FWAG, RSPB, SAC		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	1,2
4. Encourage participation in the RSPB's Volunteer & Farmer Alliance.	RSPB	FWAG, GCT, SAC		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	1,2
5. Co-ordinate the information gathered from actions E1 - E4 and use it to identify core areas for grey partridge.	RSPB	BTO, GCT, SOC		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	1,2

Action	Potential Deliverers		Year to be completed or in place						Meets objective
	Lead	Partners	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2012	
F. Communication and Publicity									
1. Through farm visits, walks, talks and articles, promote grey partridge as a “quality of life” indicator species and as a barometer of the health of farmland biodiversity. Include in at least 1 initiative/promotion annually.	FGAG	All partners	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	1,2
G. Plan Monitoring and Review									
1. Monitor the implementation of actions in this plan annually.	FGAG	All partners	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	1,2
2. Monitor the completion and effectiveness of the actions in detail and review this plan every 5 years to ensure continued effectiveness, starting in 2007.	FGAG	All partners					✓	✓	1,2

Abbreviations

BASC	- British Association for Shooting and Conservation	LEAF	- Linking Environment And Farming
BTO	- British Trust for Ornithology	RSPB	- Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
CARSE	- CARSE Local Wildlife Records Centre	SAC	- Scottish Agricultural College
FGAG	- Farmland and Grassland Action Group	SEERAD	- Scottish Executive Environment and Rural Affairs Department
FWAG	- Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group	SEPA	- Scottish Environment Protection Agency
GCT	- Game Conservancy Trust	SOC	- Scottish Ornithologists' Club

Key contacts

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