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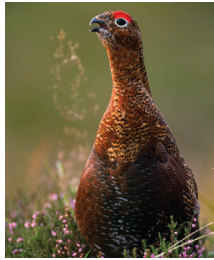
**Countryside
Alliance**



THE VALUE OF GROUSE MOOR MANAGEMENT

The red grouse

Grouse moors and their management play a key role in producing upland landscapes that are both rich in wildlife and biodiversity. Home to the red grouse, this is a species that is only found in those areas that are dominated by heather moorland, and it is one that is unique to the United Kingdom.



Grouse are truly wild, and unlike pheasants and partridges their population is not maintained or increased by the release of birds which have been hand-reared. Living on the moor all year round, red grouse are territorial and travel very little during their lives, and with the right conditions can breed prolifically. But nesting on the ground, they are particularly vulnerable to predators, disease, weather and loss of suitable habitat, which makes the preservation of this species both demanding, and of considerable importance.



A healthy breeding stock has to be maintained to prevent populations from reducing, but too many birds in an area can result in the spread of strongylosis, a disease to which it can be prone. Shooting surplus stock, and when necessary the use of medicated grit, is used to help prevent its spread.

The habitat

Heather moorland is rarer than tropical rainforest and threatened globally, with 75% of remaining habitat found in Britain. It is a habitat of international importance, and supports a rich variety of flora and fauna. Whilst the habitat may look wild, in reality it is carefully managed, and it is thanks to its management for grouse shooting that this unique landscape has been conserved, where elsewhere it has been lost.

Moorland managed for grouse shooting covers just one fifth of the uplands in England and Wales, and yet more than 70% of England's upland Sites of Special Scientific Interest are managed grouse moors, and over 40% are also designated as Special Protection Areas for rare birds and Special Areas of Conservation for rare vegetation under European wildlife directives. Over the last 100 years, considerable areas of heather have been lost through over-grazing, afforestation and bracken encroachment.

Sheep provide most of a hill farmer's income, and they have an important relationship to play with grouse. Both feed on the young tips of heather and the right amount of sheep spread evenly over a moor helps keep it healthy, whilst too many concentrating on any one part of a moor can cause damage. Having the right density of sheep for even grazing is therefore of considerable importance. Whilst bracken has its place in ghylls and low ground, it can be a problem on open moorland where it kills off heather. Its



spores are poisonous, and it is also the preferred habitat of the sheep tick which can lead to high levels of mortality in grouse through the disease louping ill. Control of bracken, and the dipping and vaccination of sheep, is therefore essential.

Recent figures produced by Natural England reveal that some 44,500 acres of moorland have been repaired and revegetated across the North of England, all on land managed for grouse shooting.

The wildlife



As ground-nesting birds, the eggs and chicks of red grouse are vulnerable to predators, and along with poor weather during the nesting season, this can often result in broods being much reduced or even completely lost. The lawful control of predators such as foxes, carrion crows, stoats and weasels, is therefore essential, and this benefits not just the red grouse, but also the many other species of threatened ground nesting birds which

share this moorland habitat to nest and rear their young. These include red listed species of the highest conservation concern, such as black grouse, lapwing, skylark, curlew, grey partridge, and the UK's smallest bird of prey, the merlin - whose numbers have doubled on grouse moors in the last 20 years, compared to elsewhere where their numbers have more than halved.

Research has shown that where moors are managed by gamekeepers, ground nesting birds such as curlew and lapwing are 3.5 times more likely to raise a chick to fledging. A survey of upland breeding birds in parts of England and Scotland also found that the densities of golden plover, curlew, redshank and lapwing were up to five times greater on managed grouse moors compared to unmanaged moorland.



Heather also needs to be managed. When left uncontrolled, it grows into a dense mass of long woody stems that supports little wildlife, has no

grazing value, and is a serious fire risk. Grouse moor management therefore also includes the rotational burning of small patches of heather which ensures that there is a mixture of older heather for protection and nesting, younger heather shoots for feeding, and a fresh burn where regrowth is just starting. The aim is to create a matrix of habitats with a mixture of heather, grasses and mosses, so that within one hectare of moorland grouse and other ground nesting birds have the full range of habitats they require. This management has shaped the heather moorlands as we know them today, our grouse moors being one of the largest protected and most unique types of habitat in the world, and one that benefits many forms of wildlife.

The black grouse, a species of the highest conservation concern, also benefits from this management. With a population that has declined 50% nationally, 96% of the surviving male black grouse in the North of England are found adjacent to moorland that is managed for red grouse, thanks to the management of predators, and the planting of over 1.1 million native trees in the ghylls of moorland fringes to help provide cover and protection.

Peatland management



There is more carbon stored in the peat of the UK's moorlands than in the combined forests of Britain and France. Severe overgrazing, bracken invasion, summer wildfires, lowland peat extraction, and erosion by wind and water can expose peat to the atmosphere causing the release of carbon dioxide. Careful management of heather as part of grouse moor management is therefore essential to help preserve the carbon locked up in the underlying peat.



Studies show that grouse moor management is a carbon positive land use – and that the controlled, rotational burning of heather helps to reduce both the risk of damaging wildfires, and carbon loss by up to 34 per cent.

Approximately 70% of the UK's drinking water comes from the uplands, and all land managers, not just those responsible for grouse moors, need to be aware of the valuable role of the uplands in the water cycle. The drainage of heather moorland with open drains was once widespread in the uplands, and in the 1960s and 70s successive governments were offering upland farmers and landowners grants for draining their land; grants that were aimed at increasing agricultural productivity, not the numbers of red grouse. However, subsequent research found that these drains continued to erode over time and that the

only way to reduce sediment run-off was to block them. Doing so could also help restore natural drainage patterns, encourage the re-vegetation of bare peat, and minimise the knock on effect of hydrological change downstream.

Grouse moor managers have been actively working with the Government and other organisations on a number of projects which include the revegetation of bare peat, and blocking of moorland drains to raise water tables to encourage the growth of sphagnum moss which slows the flow of surface water and filters out any discoloration. In the North Pennines alone, grouse moor managers have now blocked more than 2,700 miles of drainage ditches, and some 300 acres of bare peat have been re-vegetated, with plenty more still planned.

Socio-economic

Grouse moors are sustainably managed, largely through the private investment of their owners, and they offer the most cost effective model of upland management to the tax payer.



With the right conditions and management, red grouse can thrive, and produce a surplus population that can then allow shooting to take place. It is the sale of grouse shooting that helps fund the work of the gamekeepers which protects this unique habitat and the wildlife it supports. Grouse moor owners in England spend £52.5 million every year on moorland management, 90% of which is privately invested, and the majority of which benefits the rural economy. New research has also shown that businesses associated with grouse shooting benefit to the



tune of £15.2M every year. These include game dealers, accommodation providers, equipment suppliers, catering establishments and transport operators, many of whom are often based in the most remote rural locations and for whom it can be the main economic driver. The 175 grouse moors in England also support 1,520 Full Time Equivalent jobs. 700 are directly involved with grouse moor management and a further 820 jobs in related services and industries.

Game-to-Eat

Grouse shooting is at the heart of the British uplands and its economic, social and environmental importance is enormous. With its dark meat and distinctive flavour, red grouse are widely considered to be the king of all game birds, and one that is in high demand.



The Countryside Alliance's Game to Eat campaign has produced a recipe booklet which contains a collection of recipes that have been specially provided by some of our top chefs.

Red grouse can and should be enjoyed by as many people as possible - and this recipe book shows



just how adaptable, fun, and easy it is to cook when compared with many other meats, and why it should be up there with the best that this Country has to offer:

www.gametoeat.co.uk/gte/file/GtE_Grouse_Booklet_2015_LR.pdf

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The logo for the Countryside Alliance, featuring a stylized heart shape composed of blue and green curved lines.

Paradoxically, it is due to shooting that the red grouse is not on the endangered species list, and that the numbers of many of the birds which share its habitat during the breeding season are at the high levels that they are. On grouse moors, the management continues whether there is a sufficient surplus of grouse to shoot in a season, or not, and with all the factors that can adversely affect their population, there can be some years when no shooting can take place. The income from shooting is used by landowners to help offset the cost of that management, which benefits not just shooters, but also birdwatchers and all those that love to visit our heather moorlands.

www.countryside-alliance.org www.nationalgamekeepers.org.uk

Other Useful Websites

www.gwct.org.uk www.moorlandassociation.org

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