



# Grey Partridge

(*Perdix perdix*)



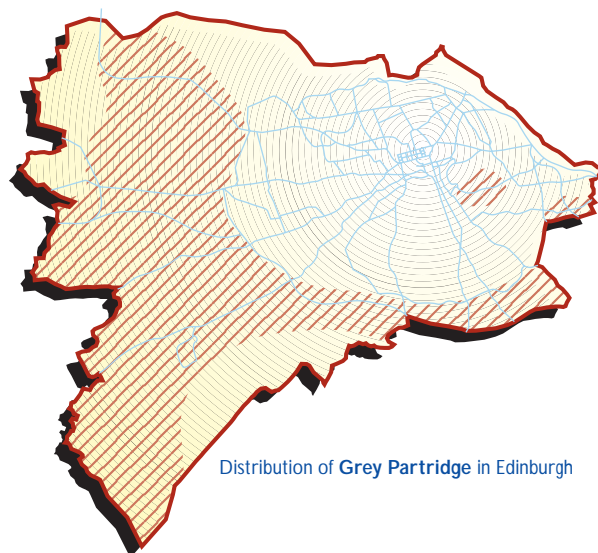
## STATUS & ECOLOGY

The grey partridge was formally a very common species over much of Great Britain. However, its range has retreated from the west by about 50km since the 1970s and it is now most abundant in the east of Britain and in central southern England. Over the last 25 years UK numbers have declined by 82%, to only 150,000 pairs, and breeding range has contracted by about 26%. The national changes in range and distribution have been reflected in Scotland, but not so extensively. In south-east Scotland there has been a withdrawal from marginal areas in the south and west, and in the uplands.

The countryside areas surrounding urban Edinburgh contain grey partridge. The majority are associated with arable farmland, but the bird penetrates higher ground in the Pentland Hills where heather moorland and rough grassland become more common. The bird has recently also been recorded in areas of rough grassland associated with new woodland plantings around Craigmillar, and in Holyrood Park in the centre of Edinburgh.

In the breeding season, mid-April to mid-September, the grey partridge favours lowland farming areas of arable or mixed grassland, or areas of unimproved dry grassland. The crucial element during this time is an abundance of invertebrates to support chicks for at least their first ten days. In winter, grey partridges are found in areas of lowland stubble and unimproved grassland, coastal dunes and upland areas of rough grazing. Those surviving on farms are dependent on stubbles, root crops, leys undersown with clover, and cereals.

The grey partridge is now on the RSPB's Red List of Birds of Conservation Concern and is listed in Annex III/I of the EC Birds Directive and in Appendix III of the Berne Convention. It is also afforded protection under various game statutes in both Great Britain and Ireland.



Distribution of Grey Partridge in Edinburgh

*“The partridge leads a communal life during the greater part of the year, being one of the more social of game birds, and at night the coveys roost, or ‘jug’, together in the open fields”*

J. Kirke Nash

## FACTORS CAUSING LOSS OR DECLINE

### Impacts

The drastic population decline and contraction in range has been linked to post-war agricultural changes, particularly the increased use of herbicides and insecticides, which have reduced its food supply. Chicks feed entirely on insects in their early days, after which the diet graduates to seeds and leaves. The destruction of hedgerows has greatly limited nesting sites, breeding birds and nests have become more vulnerable to predation due to relatively poor cover, and nests have been destroyed by the widening practice of ‘mowing’ early in the season.

### Threats

The principal threats to the grey partridge remain those associated with agricultural practices. These include continued herbicide and insecticide use; the grubbing up of hedgerow bottoms and rough grassland; a reduction in winter seed availability where stubble is ploughed for autumn-sown crops; nest destruction from farm machinery; and increased predation as a consequence of cover reduction. A continued decline in the number of gamekeepers also threatens to limit positive management for partridge.



## CURRENT ACTION

A National Grey Partridge Action Plan has been prepared as part of the UK Biodiversity Action Plan. This seeks to halt the national decline by 2005; ensure that the UK population is above 150,000 pairs by 2010; and, at least, maintain its current range. An action plan for the bird has also been prepared by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, the Game Conservancy Trust and government conservation agencies. This encourages land managers to create a suitable environment for the species by maintaining hedgerows and field margins, creating conservation headlands, and retaining winter stubble.

The British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) and Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) have organised a winter farmland bird survey for three successive winters from 1999/2000. This aims to encourage members of the public to record winter numbers and locations of winter farmland birds, including grey partridge.

## ACTION PLAN OBJECTIVES & TARGETS

### Objective

To conserve and increase the grey partridge population and distribution in Edinburgh.

### Targets

To identify grey partridge breeding and feeding sites across Edinburgh and encourage appropriate land managers to adopt land management practices that would favour the conservation of the species.

## Actions

**Undertake a survey (by call recording and questionnaire) to identify grey partridge breeding sites during Spring 2000, and winter feeding sites across Edinburgh, during Autumn 2000 and Winter 2001.**

(Actioned by: Scottish Ornithologists' Club, Farming & Wildlife Advisory Group & Game Conservancy Trust)

**Encourage local farmers, landowners and land users to become involved in the BTO/FWAG Winter Farmland Bird Survey over the Autumn/Winters of 1999/2000, 2000/2001, 2001/2002.**

(Actioned by: Edinburgh Biodiversity Partnership & British Trust for Ornithology)

**Encourage, from Spring 2001, appropriate land managers in Edinburgh to adopt land management practices, as outlined in the grey partridge national action plan, that would favour the conservation of the bird.**

(Actioned by: Farming & Wildlife Advisory Group, Game Conservancy Trust and Historic Scotland)

### Key Contacts

Scottish Ornithologists' Club  
Farming & Wildlife Advisory Group  
Game Conservancy Trust  
British Trust for Ornithology  
Historic Scotland

Alan Heavisides  
Tony Seymour  
Hugo Straker  
Alan Heavisides  
Joe Muir

## CHAMPIONS

