



Black Grouse

(*Tetrao tetrix*)

STATUS & ECOLOGY

The black grouse is a bird of open woodland and moorland edges, with a range extending from northern Europe to northern Asia. Although once common throughout these areas it has declined rapidly in recent years and is currently on the verge of extinction in several countries. The UK population declined in range by 28% between 1968-72 and 1988-91. The most recent population estimate is 6,510 lekking males, 4,900 of which are in Scotland, compared to 25,000 in 1990.

Black grouse are largely dependent upon suitable management of moorland and woodland edge. They require vegetative cover for nesting, roosting and protection from predators. Their dietary requirements are wide-ranging but generally feature high-protein cotton grass, pine and larch buds in spring, then berries and seeds in summer and autumn. In winter, shoots and buds of heather, blaeberry, pine, birch, hawthorn, willow, alder, rowan and juniper are occasionally supplemented by grain from stock feeders or stubble fields. Invertebrates are also important, particularly for chicks during the first three weeks after hatching.

It is estimated that there are around 500-600 lekking males in south-east Scotland, some 10% of the UK population. Of these there are a few localised black grouse leks in the Pentland Hills, although no sightings have been made within the Edinburgh section of the Pentland Hills during recent years. However, with a declining national population, and a significant proportion in south-east Scotland, it is essential that efforts are made to conserve those local black grouse populations that remain and to encourage black grouse back to traditional breeding areas.



“The reward of finding a lek on a bright, still and frosty spring morning is one that is not forgotten”

Mark Holling

The black grouse is protected under the Game Acts as well as Annex II/2 of the EC Habitats Directive and Appendix III of the Berne Convention. Populations are required to be protected from exploitation and managed to keep them out of danger.

FACTORS CAUSING LOSS OR DECLINE

Impacts

Overgrazing and agricultural improvement, such as re-seeding of rough grazing areas and traditional hay meadows, are key factors in the decline of black grouse. The effects of agricultural improvement have been exacerbated by the draining of marshy areas, which has reduced invertebrate food sources and cover; the loss of woodland understorey as conifer plantations mature and canopies close; and deaths caused by collisions with fencing and possibly overhead cables.

The deterioration of the quality and content of moorland habitats has also occurred through a general decline in managed grouse moors. Increased predation, a result of reduced numbers of active gamekeepers, is also a contributory factor to the decline of the black grouse.

Threats

The impacts listed continue to threaten black grouse numbers and reduce the bird's distribution, having an exacerbated effect as local populations become increasingly separate from each other. To these could be added poor weather conditions, which can affect black grouse chick survival; over-shooting at the local level; and human disturbance, particularly at leks.



CURRENT ACTION

A national Black Grouse Action Plan has been prepared as part of the UK Biodiversity Action Plan. This seeks to stem or reverse the decline in numbers and range of the species in the UK, in order to hold or restore the population to its 1996 size and range by 2005; increase its range and abundance in the long term; prevent further population fragmentation; and promote recolonisation of formally occupied areas between currently isolated populations by 2005.

Research by the Forestry Commission, Game Conservancy Trust and Royal Society for the Protection of Birds has shown that management measures aimed at woodland regeneration, grazing reduction and predator control increase black grouse populations. The Game Conservancy Trust is to produce a black grouse management handbook.

Collaborative recovery projects for black grouse are being developed and implemented in different parts of the UK, including the North Pennines and Dumfries & Galloway. A recovery project for south east Scotland is being headed by the RSPB.

ACTION PLAN OBJECTIVES & TARGETS

Objectives

To contribute to the UK black grouse action plan and work with neighbouring biodiversity action plan organisers in Mid and West Lothian to establish a sustainable black grouse population in the Pentland Hills Regional Park.

Targets

To identify appropriate black grouse habitat and feeding sites in Edinburgh and encourage appropriate land managers to adopt land management practices that would favour the conservation of the species.

Actions

Undertake a survey to identify black grouse locations and numbers in the Pentland Hills during Spring 2001.

(Actioned by: Pentland Hills Regional Park)

Undertake a survey to identify appropriate black grouse habitat and feeding sites in the Pentland Hills during Spring & Summer 2001.

(Actioned by: Pentland Hills Regional Park)

Encourage, from Spring 2002, appropriate land managers in the Pentland Hills to adopt land management practices, as outlined in the Game Conservancy Trust's black grouse management handbook, that would favour the conservation of the bird.

(Actioned by: Pentland Hills Regional Park, Farming & Wildlife Advisory Group, Game Conservancy Trust & Ministry of Defence)

Key Contacts

Pentland Hills Regional Park
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CHAMPIONS



THE GAME
CONSERVANCY
TRUST



pentland hills
regional park

