

NORFOLK BIODIVERSITY ACTION PLAN

GREY PARTRIDGE (*Perdix perdix*)

This, the native partridge, is distinguished by its rusty face and grey body. It is a classic farmland bird, at home in mixed and arable countryside. After breeding, it forms flocks known as coveys. Its flight is fast and direct.

Ref 1/S8	Tranche 1	Species Action Plan 8
Plan Author:	RSPB	
Plan Co-ordinator:	Farmland BAP Topic Group	
Plan Leader:	RSPB	
Date:	Stage:	
31 December 1998	Final Draft	
January 2006	Revised Final Draft	

1. CURRENT STATUS

National Status

- The UK population has declined by 88% between 1977 and 2002 and continues to decline. It is estimated that its population is about 75,000 pairs.
- Grey partridge is protected in the close season in Britain under the Game Acts. It is also listed on Annex III/I of the EC Birds Directive and Appendix III of the Bern Convention.

Norfolk Status

- In the early twentieth century, the partridge was probably occupying virtually all cultivated land. The Norfolk Bird Atlas surveyed its distribution in the late 1980s, when it was found in 37% of Norfolk 2km² (red-legged partridge occupied 90%) with a pronounced concentration in the north-west of the county.
- It now has a rather patchy distribution in Norfolk with concentrations in north-west, mid and north Norfolk as well as the Brecks, linked (but not exclusively) to light soils and positive management. The population could be circa 6,000 pairs, but good data away from the managed areas is sparse.

2. CURRENT FACTORS CAUSING LOSS OR DECLINE IN NORFOLK

- Changes in farming practice in recent decades, including:
 - Loss of nest sites (such as hedge bottoms) through intensification and insensitive management of what remains.
 - Reduced food supplies and insects for chicks in particular, through the increasing use and efficiency of insecticides and herbicides.
 - The loss of winter stubbles as feeding grounds, due to increasing sowing of 'winter' crops and spraying with herbicide those stubbles that remain.
 - Vulnerability of nests to predators in farmland with poor cover exacerbated by the decline in traditional keeping.
- More inclement spring weather (possibly).
- Shooting on areas where there is no positive management will contribute to further decline.

3. CURRENT ACTION IN NORFOLK

- The Game Conservancy Trust (GCT) encourages land managers to create suitable conditions for grey partridge, including suitable nest sites, cover, summer and winter feeding areas (eg, conservation headlands and winter stubbles), and control of predators principally foxes, magpies and crows. Norfolk has a county Partridge Group which co-ordinates monitoring and disseminates good practice such as the recent GCT guidelines, 'Conserving the grey partridge' which advises among a list of five points not shooting grey partridges after the end of December.
- Management guidelines for grey partridge are widely distributed by GCT, FWAG, Defra-RDS (shortly to become part of Natural England) and RSPB.
- Grey partridge is targeted by arable options under agri-environment. Field margin management and conservation headlands under Countryside Stewardship and the Breckland agri-environment schemes should help grey partridges. The Environmental Stewardship schemes will continue to target and provide management options for this species.
- Set-aside is positively used to benefit partridges on a number of farms and estates.

4. ACTION PLAN OBJECTIVES AND TARGETS

National

- Halt the decline by 2005.
- Ensure the population is above 150,000 pairs by 2010.
- Maintain the current range of this species.
- Enhance the current geographical range of this species, where biologically feasible.

Norfolk

- Maintain and increase the current estimated numbers and range of grey partridge in Norfolk.
- Target effort on remaining strongholds to encourage re-building a more extensive distribution. By 2010, breeding partridges to be present in all suitable areas, with the breeding population generally increasing towards an ultimate target of 14,500 pairs.

Grey Partridge - Norfolk Action Plan

NATIONAL ACTION		NORFOLK ACTION	ACTION BY:	PARTNERS:
5.1	Policy and Legislation			
5.1.1	Consider the requirements of the grey partridge when establishing and reviewing agri-environment schemes.	Consider the needs of grey partridge when targeting the Higher Level Environmental Stewardship scheme.	NE	Farmland BAP Group
5.1.2	Consider the requirements of the grey partridge in any negotiations on changes to, or reform of, agricultural support.	Ensure sufficient funding for arable options under agri-environment schemes targeted at grey partridge. Establish a pilot project in north-west Norfolk to promote partridge conservation and with monitoring to identify the necessary level of funding to secure the species' future.	ALL NE	
5.1.3	Encourage targeted use of pesticides on farmland.	Encourage minimal use of pesticides on targeted farmland.	NE, FWAG	
5.2	Site Safeguard and Management			
5.2.1	No actions proposed.	No actions proposed.		
5.3	Species Management and Protection			
5.3.1	No action proposed.	Promote appropriate set-aside management, particularly in and around areas where partridges are known to survive, and particularly in north-west Norfolk target area. Review or develop management plans for publicly-owned land to maintain or improve suitability for grey partridge.	NE, FWAG, GCT, Norfolk Partridge Group, Farmland BAP Group Crown Estates, Norfolk County Farms, NT, MoD	Farmers and Landowners

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NATIONAL ACTION		NORFOLK ACTION	ACTION BY:	PARTNERS:
		<p>Promote GCT 2001 guidelines on management and shooting to all game shooters.</p> <p>Promote the GCT guidelines to shoot owners and encourage them to include appropriate conditions in leases.</p> <p>Seek to invoke sanctions against shooters failing to follow GCT policy eg explore an accreditation scheme for game dealers.</p> <p>Discourage the release of reared red and grey partridges in the north-west Norfolk target area.</p>	<p>GCT, NFU, BASC, CLA</p> <p>GCT, NFU, BASC, CLA</p> <p>GCT, NFU, BASC, CLA</p> <p>GCT, NFU, BASC, CLA</p>	Norfolk Police
5.4	Advisory			
5.4.1	Continue to provide information and management advice to land managers through GCT, FWAG and other advisers.	<p>Continue to provide information and advice on whole farms, etc, through GCT, FWAG and other advisers.</p> <p>A package of advice and guidelines to be sent to all holdings in the north-west Norfolk target area.</p>	<p>GCT, FWAG, NE, Norfolk Partridge Group</p> <p>GCT, FWAG, NE, Norfolk Partridge Group</p>	
5.4.2	Promote field margins as wildlife habitat.	Organise at least one event per year that will specifically focus on grey partridge.	Norfolk Partridge Group, GCT, Norfolk Farmland BAP Group, NE	
5.5	Future Research and Monitoring			
5.5.1	Continue to investigate the ecological requirements of the grey partridge to help develop management advice.	Encourage local research, especially when linked to farmland management for grey partridge, and disseminate results.	GCT, UEA	

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NATIONAL ACTION		NORFOLK ACTION	ACTION BY:	PARTNERS:
5.5.2	Investigate the impact of different management regimes on grey partridge populations, using selected farms with experimental schemes or Environmentally Sensitive Area prescriptions.	No actions proposed.		
5.5.3	Encourage regular monitoring of the UK population through census work and bag returns.	Encourage regular monitoring of the Norfolk population through census work and bag returns, and better use of existing data.	Norfolk Partridge Group, RSPB, NE	BTO
5.5.4	Promote further research into the indirect effects of agrochemical use on the grey partridge.	Develop a robust census technique to assess numbers in Norfolk as a whole.	GCT, Norfolk Partridge Group, NE	BTO
5.5.5	Pass information gathered during survey and monitoring of this species to Joint Nature Conservation Committee or Biological Records Centre so that it can be incorporated in national databases.	No actions proposed.		
5.5.5	Pass information gathered during survey and monitoring of this species to Joint Nature Conservation Committee or Biological Records Centre so that it can be incorporated in national databases.	Pass information gathered during survey and monitoring of this species to the Norfolk Biological Records Centre and other appropriate repositories.	Norfolk Partridge Group, RSPB, NE	
5.5.6	Provide information annually to BirdLife International on the UK status of the species to contribute to maintenance of an up-to-date global red list.	No actions proposed.		

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NATIONAL ACTION		NORFOLK ACTION	ACTION BY:	PARTNERS:
5.6	Communications and Publicity			
5.6.1	Use grey partridge in agriculture courses to illustrate the impact farm management may have on wildlife.	<p>Ensure Easton College has management for grey partridge and other farmland wildlife in agriculture courses.</p> <p>Use grey partridge as a flagship indicator species of the biodiversity health of the Norfolk countryside.</p> <p>Ensure that the proposed Farmland Bird Centre at Bayfield delivers effective information about grey partridge conservation.</p>	<p>RSPB</p> <p>Norfolk Biodiversity Partnership, NFU, CLA</p> <p>Cley-Spy</p>	Easton College

NORFOLK DISTRIBUTION

MANAGEMENT GUIDANCE

(This guidance is a general summary; for detailed information or advice consult the references or contacts below.)

What Do Grey Partridges Need?

- Insects to feed to chicks in the spring and summer.

Grey partridge chicks feed on insects, especially caterpillars, beetles, bugs, ants and aphids. Breeding is more successful when there is plenty of this food available. Chicks take insects mainly from crop margins.

- Lots of seeds throughout the year.

Adult grey partridges feed mainly on seeds and shoots throughout the year. They seek places where they can find lots of seed food. Such areas include rotational set-aside, winter stubbles, harvested root crops, newly-sown crops and weeds in the crop margins.

- Safe nesting cover.

Grey partridges nest on the ground in hedge bottoms, grass margins, beetle banks, cereals, game cover and nettle beds. Dead tussocky grass left over from the previous year is particularly attractive as nesting cover.

Encouraging Grey Partridges on Set-Aside

- You can provide seed food throughout the winter at a low cost with a one acre plot of wild bird cover. Establish a seed-rich crop in the spring and maintain it for two years. Kale and quinoa are particularly useful components in the mix.
- You can also establish brood-rearing cover in the autumn. Use a mix of a cereal and a brassica – such as mustard – or linseed, and up to 5% red clover to attract insects. Establishing this adjacent to a tussocky grass margin creates an insect-rich chick feeding area. Maintain this for two years to provide seed in the second winter.
- The natural regeneration of rotational set-aside provides more seed food over winter than non-rotational set-aside.
- If possible, delay the use of a broad-spectrum herbicide until July. This will provide important feeding and nesting habitat in the spring. Alternatively, 20 metre strips of non-rotational set-aside can provide nesting habitat. Cut on or just before 15 August and make use of the option to leave 25% uncut for up to three years.

Encouraging Grey Partridges on Arable Land

- Only use pesticides when the infestation exceeds the economic threshold. Try to avoid using broad-spectrum insecticides after 15 March. These remove beneficial insects and spiders that move into the crops in the spring. The loss of this food source is particularly damaging to grey partridges.
- Adopt conservation headlands. Avoid spraying the outer six metres of cereal fields with non-selective insecticides or herbicides. This enables beneficial insects and chick food for grey partridges to survive. You can get agronomic advice from the Game Conservancy Trust.
- Spray and cultivate stubbles as late as possible as they provide important winter feeding habitat.
- The rotational set-aside options described above are very important on farms where over-winter stubbles are not a viable option.
- Create grass margins around arable fields as nesting habitat for grey partridges. Include species such as cocksfoot in the seed mix to create tussocks. After the margins are established, cut only in the autumn once every three years. Avoid cutting all margins in the same year.
- Use beetle banks in fields greater than 20 hectares to provide nesting cover and over-wintering habitat for beneficial insects. Beetle banks are two metre grass strips through the middle of arable fields. Such fields can be managed as one unit, as the headland is still cropped.

Encouraging Grey Partridges on Grassland

- Growing spring-sown arable fodder crops or small plots of wild bird cover will benefit grey partridges in areas that are largely agricultural grassland. The crop and following stubble both provide abundant seed food.
- Undersown cereal crops will provide seed food through the winter. The lack of cultivation in the autumn as well as restrictions on herbicide use will produce an abundant supply of insects.
- Fence off margins of up to six metres around improved grass fields and leave these unfertilised, uncut and ungrazed. Graze or cut in September every two to three years. Avoid cutting all margins in the same year. Select margins that are adjacent to short thick hedges (less than two metres).

Five Golden Rules for Game Shooters

1. Do not shoot wild grey partridges if you have fewer than 20 birds per 250 acres (100 hectares) in the autumn. Below this level, the population has little ability to compensate for shooting losses.
2. Avoid shooting grey partridges after the end of December. Birds pair up in the new year and shooting at this time reduces the breeding stock.
3. Never shoot at grey partridges that are in pairs.
4. With driven redleg shooting, take special precautions to ensure that wild greys are not shot at the same time.

- Warn the guns if grey partridges are likely to be on the drive.
- Tell the guns to watch out for higher birds in tight coveys that might be greys. Tell them, if in doubt, not to shoot. Perhaps fine them if they shoot greys!
- Arrange a system of whistles for beaters to warn guns that greys have been flushed – their unique call also helps to identify them. Have observers in the line of guns to do the same.

5. *Do not shoot grey partridges at all unless you also take steps to conserve them.*

CONTACTS

Norfolk FWAG
122a Thorpe Road
Norwich
Norfolk
NR1 1RN
Tel: 01603-660334 / Fax: 01603-660378 / Email: norfolk@fwag.org.uk

RSPB
East Anglia Regional Office
Stalham House
65 Thorpe Road
Norwich
Norfolk
NR1 1UD
Tel: 01603-660066 / Fax: 01603-660088 / Web: www.rspb.org.uk/farming

The Game Conservancy Trust
Fordingbridge
Hampshire
SP6 1EF
Tel: 01425-652381 / Fax: 01425-655848/ Email: admin@gct.org.uk/ Web: www.gct.org.uk

Defra RDS (to become part of Natural England in October 2006)
122a Thorpe Road
Norwich
Norfolk
NR1 1RN
Tel: 01603-631033

REFERENCES

Tapper, S. (2001, revised 2004). *Conserving the grey partridge. A practical guide produced by the Game Conservancy Trust for farmers, landowners and local Biodiversity Action Plan Groups.* GCT: Fordingbridge.