

# Creating the ultimate... *pheasant release pen*



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**P**heasant release pens should provide a safe, stimulating environment for poults to acclimatise themselves to a life in the wild. Attention to detail and getting the key elements right are essential to produce strong, healthy, well-adapted pheasants. Building a new pen is a significant investment in time and money, so it is important to get it right. Get it wrong and you could suffer high losses to predation, stress or disease.

The key elements of open ground, shrubby cover and diverse roosting cover should be spread evenly throughout the pen. This prevents crowding and, by ensuring that there is plenty of shrubby cover in the pen, will reduce problems with buzzards and other aerial predators, as the poults will always have cover close by.

For more advice please contact us on 01425 651013 or download the factsheet at [www.gwct.org.uk/releasepen](http://www.gwct.org.uk/releasepen)

Once you have decided which wood to locate the release pen in, you need to create the right environment for poults to thrive. An ideal pen will include one third each of open ground, low shrubby cover and roosting cover of varying heights. This habitat should extend beyond the release pen into the surrounding woodland habitat.



Allow a one-hectare release pen for every 1,000 poults (10m<sup>2</sup> per bird). If possible, avoid releasing in ancient woodland, but if there is no other suitable release site, reduce the stocking density to 700 birds/ha per release pen to avoid damage to woodland ground flora.

Build a fence (a minimum of 2.1 metres high) with two mesh sizes: 2cm wire mesh at the bottom (essential to prevent damage by rats) and 5cm mesh at the top (wire or black plastic). Black plastic deer fencing for the upper section of fencing is cost effective, has a lower visual impact and can be re-used if the pen is re-sited in the future. Leave 30cm of wire mesh dug in or laid out and pegged at the bottom. Also, have a fringe folded outwards (30cm) at the top. Avoid square corners to the pen.

Hang the netting loosely to make climbing difficult for predators. Construct a pop hole with an anti-fox re-entry grid every 50m. Make gates wide enough for vehicular access



Use two strands of electric fencing wire at 15cm and 30cm height set back 50cm from the pen.



### Release pens and return rates

Are you interested in comparing return rates between different release pens on your shoot? Then please participate in the GWCT wing tagging survey. This fascinating research study collects data on release pen characteristics and releasing strategies and how these factors influence return rates. For more information, contact Maureen Woodburn at [mwoodburn@gwct.org.uk](mailto:mwoodburn@gwct.org.uk)