



Fact sheet 6

Environmental Stewardship: Making the most for grey partridges

There are a wide range of options available in England within the Entry Level Scheme (ELS) and the Higher Level Scheme (HLS) to benefit the grey partridge. For those managing grey partridge populations in Scotland, explore grant opportunities under Land Managers Options and Rural Priorities within the Scottish Rural Development Programme.

When considering how to target these options to maximise the potential for grey partridges on a given area of

land, remember to think of their needs for the whole year. The three key themes to provide are:

- Nesting cover
- Brood-rearing cover
- Winter and early spring cover

If these three important factors can be provided across the farm and coupled with predator control during the breeding season, there is no reason why grey partridges should not thrive.

The Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust

For over 75 years our scientists have been researching why species like the grey partridge, water vole, corn bunting and black grouse have declined. We are continually developing practical measures to reverse these declines.

Our aim is simple - a thriving countryside rich in game and other wildlife.

We are an independent charity reliant on voluntary donations and the support of people who care about the survival of our natural heritage.

Nesting cover

Ideally, grey partridges need long linear strips or small patches of tussocky grass that have not been cut in the previous year. Large areas of tussocky grass, however, are not suitable and should be avoided. Partridges will only use the edges of the bigger blocks of grass. The following options can be used to deliver suitable cover for

grey partridges to nest in:

- Buffer strip options: EE1, EE2, EE3, EE4, EE5, EE6
- Field corner management: EF1, EK1
- Beetle banks: EF7

These same options are also available under the HLS.

Good nesting cover for grey partridges



Why should you read this fact sheet?

This series of fact sheets explains how to restore grey partridges on your farm, based on the results of our practical research. Restoring these birds on farmland will help us to achieve Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) targets for this and other BAP species, including other ground-nesting birds and rare arable wildflowers. It will also allow you to achieve the best out of your wild gamebirds.

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Brood-rearing areas

An ideal area for partridge chicks to forage for insects should consist of a sparse overhead canopy – such as a thin cereal crop, to protect them from avian predators. It should have a scattering of broad-leaved weeds in the base of the mix, so that insects are attracted onto these weeds and are available for small chicks to gather.

The following options under ELS can be chosen to deliver good brood-rearing areas:

- Unfertilised conservation headlands/ unharvested cereal headlands: EF9, EF10

The wild bird seed mix, EG2, EF2 may also be used at six metres wide and planted with a mixture such as cereal, linseed and mustard. When choosing this option do not fertilise, and use a low seed rate so that the area does not become too thick. Chicks need to be able to move around in the crop and they will struggle if it is too thick at the base. This latter option can be left over-winter to supply food and cover for partridges and can be renewed in the spring each year.

The HLS offers further options over and above ELS, and they are as follows:

- Reduced herbicide in cereal crops: HF15, HF18
- Low input option in spring cereals: HG7

Winter/spring cover

There are two sorts of cover – the type that just acts as cover and the type that supplies a food source as well. Cover only options are:

- Buffer strips: EE1, EE2, EE3, EE4, EE5, EE6
- Field corner management: EF1
- Beetle banks: EF7

Ideally, cover should also provide food during the winter and spring time. The options that offer food are:

- Wild bird seed mix: EF2
- Wild bird seed mix in grassland: EG2
- Over-winter stubbles: EF6
- Cultivated margins: EF11 (only if they are left uncultivated until the spring)

The HLS includes all of the above and offers further chances to deliver food and cover for grey partridges. The following supply both cover and food, although with fodder crops it depends to some extent, on how much weed has grown within the crop:

- Enhanced wild bird seed mix: HF12
- Unharvested conservation headlands: HF14
- Reduced herbicide in cereals preceding over-wintered stubble: HF15, HF18
- Fodder crops: HG6

Where possible, choose some mixtures for the wild bird seed option that include

kale so that the crop can last for two years. This will mean that the second year kale will provide important cover for grey partridges in early spring when they break up from their coveys, because this is a time when they are particularly vulnerable to predation. If all your wild bird seed mixes are annual crops, the cover is all removed for replanting at just the wrong time.

Grey partridge habitat requirements for all seasons are now catered for in these environmental schemes, so make good use of them and help this glorious bird become a common sight once again on our farmland.

A good example of second year kale grown alongside brood-rearing cover



More information

The Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust's Advisory Service can provide further advice on feeding systems for gamebirds, and on all aspects of game management. For information, please contact 01425 651013.

