



STEP 1. Cut the top out of a drum with an angle grinder, leaving the top rim intact for strength. Clean out the drum if needed. Make a clip-on top from a sheet of metal approx 5cm wider than the drum, by folding over approx 2.5cm each side.



STEP 2. Cut slots in the base with a hammer and cold chisel. These can be adjusted for food flow. Open with twist of a screwdriver, close by tapping from inside with a hammer.



STEP 3. Paint a neutral 'country' colour, so that it blends into its landscape. Ours are all dark green for uniformity and tidiness.

Feed and they'll breed

Mike Swan explains why gamebirds need to be fed and nurtured into the spring and a simple way of providing them with a food source.

THE HARDEST time of year for adult gamebirds is late winter and early spring. By this time the spilt grain and weed seeds left over from harvest have mostly gone, as has the natural harvest of hedgerow berries. There may be lots of succulent new shoots from the spring growth, but they are just

like asparagus without the butter – quite enjoyable, but not many calories!

At this time of year gamebirds lose weight, so that come breeding time, when the pressure is really on, they have less in reserve to produce and incubate clutches. Our research has shown that when pheasants are well fed through the spring,

they are much more successful, on average fledging 85% more chicks per hen. Also, a well fed bird is much more likely to attempt to re-nest if she fails the first time.

It is important to understand that effective spring feeding needs a different approach from what is carried out in the shooting season. Pheasants, in particular, spread away from their winter coverts to woodland edges, hedgerows, ditches, pit holes and other more boundary habitats. Spring feeding is therefore best moved with them, and hoppers are the ideal tool.

There is a multitude of designs in use around the country, and there is not a right design. What is best for you will be dictated by which species are likely to raid them. However, a simple home made design, using a 20 or 25 litre metal drum has much to commend it, and the pictures show what to do. Metal drums are essential in most circumstances to avoid hopper destruction by rats or grey squirrels. These days second hand ones

An ideal site for wild grey partridges on a beetle bank.





Above: a good site for pheasants on the corner of a patch of scrub. Note that this hopper is fixed to two posts, to make it harder for fallow deer to knock it off.

STEP 4 (left). Nail to a post, fill with wheat and clip the lid on. The base should be about knee high for pheasants, and $\frac{2}{3}$ this height for partridges.

are hard to find, but new drums fit for 'conversion' are available from Taylor Davis (01373 864324).

One last thought if you are in any doubt as to whether to spring feed, is to consider the words of the *Code of Good Shooting Practice*: "Sufficient feed for released birds remaining after the end of the shooting

season must be provided until adequate natural food is available. Supplementary feeding should normally continue to the end of May." The reasoning behind this is two-fold, firstly abandonment of birds is hardly fair, and secondly those abandoned birds will seek food in nearby gardens where they can wreak considerable damage.

factfile

- A detailed fact sheet on how to spring feed, for both pheasants and partridges, is published on our website (www.gct.org.uk). It is also available free of charge on receipt of a stamped addressed envelope to Joanne Hilton at HQ.

Regional grey partridge groups by Ian Lindsay

IN 2004 we launched a new and highly successful regional initiative to target our most up-to-date recommendations for grey partridge management to those directly interested in the bird's conservation. As the national lead partner for the grey partridge BAP, we have formed these groups as a key way of achieving the target of an increase in the population by 40% in 2010. The groups each have two meetings a year to provide a valuable forum for farmers and landowners wishing to use Entry Level and Higher Level Stewardship to help grey partridges on their land. The meetings also enable us to fly the flag for the national partridge count scheme. Today, over 900 individual landowners contribute to the scheme, making it the biggest farmer led wildlife monitoring scheme in Europe.

Currently, groups exist in the Cotswolds, Wessex, Norfolk, Northumberland, East Lothian and South Lincolnshire. In 2006, we hope to set up further groups in at least four

other areas including Shropshire, Kent, Cumbria and Hertfordshire.

Full details of the groups are available from our website: www.gct.org.uk

The Duke of Northumberland (pictured left with his two gamekeepers) recently launched our Northumberland Grey Partridge Recovery Group. (James Marchington)

