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## Brief for Jonathan Shaw MP – Defra

The Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust (formerly The Game Conservancy Trust), established in 1980, is a wildlife conservation trust that conducts scientific research into Britain's game and wildlife populations. We also advise farmers and landowners on improving wildlife habitat in the interest of conservation and biodiversity, and campaign for science-based agricultural and conservation policies.

Our objectives are:

- to promote for the public benefit the conservation and study of game species, their habitats and the other species associated with those habitats;
- to conduct research into the ecology and biology of game species and their environmental requirements and to publish the results of such research; and
- to advance the education of the public in game biology and the conservation of game.

The Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust undertakes its own research as well as projects commissioned by government and private bodies. We have carried out research under contract for Defra, and agencies like Natural England, Scottish Natural Heritage and Environment Agency also sponsor some of it. We also work collaboratively in research project, for example with the RSPB and the British Trust for Ornithology. *We spent over £3 million on research annually. We employ 94 staff, including 44 scientists, with expertise in such areas as ornithology, entomology, biometrics, mammalogy, agronomics and fisheries science. Last year we published 47 scientific papers in peer-reviewed journals.*

Many of our supporters take part in field sports. The Trust believes that field sports play a positive role in countryside conservation, by helping to preserve precious landscapes and by creating habitats where diverse wildlife can flourish. We urge those who do not support shooting as a sporting activity to consider the environmental benefits that game management for field sports brings to many areas of the United Kingdom.

The following examples of the conservation benefits of game management may be of interest.

### Preserving precious landscapes

Heather moorland is a rare and declining landscape. It the subject of a Joint Nature Conservation Committee Habitat Action Plan. Government agencies acknowledge that management for grouse shooting has protected upland heather and blanket bog from conifer forest planting. In Scotland,

over a 40-year period grouse moors lost only 24% of their heather, whereas on non-shooting moors the loss was 41%.

Many ancient woodlands have been saved from commercial forestry by game management. Pheasants are woodland birds, and the maintenance of lowland woods for pheasant shooting has prevented large areas of woodland from being converted into conifer plantations.

One case study showed that woodland managed for pheasants by coppicing and ride cutting had a richer ground flora and butterfly fauna than woodland that had been neglected or managed solely for timber.

### Creating diverse wildlife habitats

Moors managed for grouse typically have five times as many golden plover and lapwing as unmanaged moors, and about twice as many curlew. In fact English grouse moors have such high populations of waders that the bulk of the Pennines and North York Moors have been designated as Special Protection Areas for birds under the European Birds Directive

Breeding golden plovers, dunlins, lapwings and curlews are disappearing throughout much of England and Wales. Only on grouse moors do breeding distributions remain relatively stable.

The merlin, Britain's smallest bird of prey, is almost twice as common on grouse moors as it is on other upland moors.

Management of woodland for pheasant shooting results in higher numbers of songbirds and woodland butterflies.

Songbirds have a better chance of surviving over winter on farmland where game crops are sown. Winter bird counts showed that there were often up to 100 times more birds in game crops as there were in nearby arable crops, set-aside or stubble.

### The Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust's demonstration farm

The Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust runs an 823 acre demonstration farm in Loddington, Leicestershire. Allerton Farm, shows how game management and farming can be integrated to the benefit of wildlife using the methods developed by the Trust.

Over a period of ten years at the farm:

- autumn numbers of wild pheasant increased from fewer than 150 to over 600;
- numbers of brown hares increased by more than ten times;
- overall songbird numbers more than doubled, while the trend in numbers on nearby farms continued to decline; and
- harvest mice thrived in the field margins and especially in the beetle banks planted with long stemmed cock's-foot grass.

The success of the combined game management and farming methods used at Allerton provides encouragement for all those concerned with conservation, and it represents an exciting and practical way forward for many British farmers. Farms that adopt this game management strategy will be able to deliver Defra's targets for improving farmland bird populations on a local scale, possibly in fewer than five years.

### The future

The Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust believes that the future conservation of our landscape and wildlife will continue to benefit from game management activities associated with field sports. We would like to encourage a greater understanding amongst decision-makers and legislators of the positive impact on our natural environment of these activities.