



Left: © Tarquin Millington-Drake; Above: © Matt Limb

# 1. Grouse Shooting

Grouse shooting in the UK occurs in two main forms: driven shooting and walked-up, often over dogs. Driven shooting typically requires higher grouse densities, and this needs more effective management. The scale and impact of this management is the issue which provokes much of the debate around grouse shooting. This chapter describes grouse shooting and introduces the management techniques used.

## **What are grouse and where are they found?**

There are four species of grouse in Britain: red grouse, black grouse, capercaillie and ptarmigan. The red grouse population is estimated to be 230,000 pairs<sup>1</sup>, and it is one of this country's few endemic sub-species, meaning that they are only found in the British Isles. They inhabit heather moorland including areas of both blanket bog and upland heath.

The black grouse population is estimated to be 5,100 males UK-wide<sup>1</sup>. They are found on the moorland fringe and use hill-edge woodlands of both conifer and deciduous species. There are fewer than 2,000 capercaillie in a handful of pine-dominated Scottish woodlands<sup>1</sup>. Ptarmigan live above 800m and like capercaillie are also only found in Scotland. Grouse populations tend to fluctuate in size over the years and in relation to management, so these figures are an estimate.

<b>Species</b>	<b>Population estimate</b>	<b>Population status</b>	<b>UK conservation trend</b>
Red grouse	230,000 pairs	Fluctuating	Amber listed
Black grouse	5,100 males	Severe decline	Red listed
Capercaillie	1,300 individuals (800-1,900)	Severe decline	Red listed
Ptarmigan	2,000-15,000 pairs	Unknown (range stable)	Green listed

The number and trends of grouse species in the UK, based on figures from Birds of Conservation Concern 4<sup>2</sup>, Population estimates of birds in Great Britain and the UK<sup>1</sup> and Birdlife International's Datazone.

### **Which grouse are shot on driven grouse moors?**

Red grouse. They are regarded as the paragon of gamebirds because their speed and agility provides challenging shooting.

### **Are red grouse wild birds?**

Yes. Red grouse are entirely wild, unlike many pheasant or partridge shoots, which rely on rearing and releasing birds. Although attempts have been made to rear red grouse, this has not been successful. Grouse management aims to maintain moorland in a high-quality condition for these wild birds.

### **What is driven shooting?**

Red grouse, pheasants and partridges are ‘driven’, where birds are flushed by a line of beaters and fly over the people shooting (the ‘Guns’), who are stationary in a line. On grouse moors they typically stand in a line of ‘butts’ – specially constructed shooting positions often built out of wood, stone and turf. Red grouse are also shot ‘walked-up’, where the participants walk across the moorland, flushing birds as they go, often using dogs to find grouse.



*Grouse butts are fundamental to driven shooting and are a cultural aspect of some UK moorlands © Steve Jackson*

### **How are driven grouse moors managed?**

Moorland management for driven grouse shooting includes controlling generalist predators such as crows and foxes, heather management, often by grazing and prescribed burning, and disease control. These topics are discussed in their own chapters through this book.

### **Are there benefits of driven grouse shooting over walked-up shooting?**

Aiming to produce enough grouse to drive means moors have to invest more in staff, time and equipment than where walked up shooting is the only aim. This allows more consistent, effective predator and disease control, along with habitat management. This greater investment in management has benefits for other moorland wildlife, such as species of ground-nesting birds<sup>3-6</sup>, and for habitats and the environment (see chapter 2 on conservation). A driven grouse shoot can make this additional investment because the economic returns for driven shooting are much greater than for walked-up shooting<sup>7</sup> (see chapter 10 for more information about the economics of grouse moors).

### **Are there negative impacts?**

If the law and best practice guidelines are not followed, there can be negative impacts from practices such as illegal raptor killing or inappropriate burning. Some impacts can be avoided by adherence to the law and best practice guidance, which uses the best available knowledge to avoid or reduce these to acceptable levels. These issues will be discussed throughout the book.

### **Are the benefits widely recognised?**

Yes. In response to the last petition to ban driven grouse shooting in 2016, the UK government released a statement recognising that: “When carried out in accordance with the law, grouse shooting

for sport is a legitimate activity and in addition to its significant economic contribution, providing jobs and investment in some of our most remote areas, it can offer important benefits for wildlife and habitat conservation”<sup>8</sup>.

Managed heather moorland has been recognised as iconic and archetypal<sup>9</sup>, and the Scottish Cabinet Secretary for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform has expressed a wish to “... ensure that grouse moor management continues to contribute to the rural economy...”<sup>10</sup>.



*In driven shooting, beaters flush the birds over the waiting Guns. © Matt Limb*