

Grey partridge

NEWS

A report to all those interested in grey partridge conservation

Issue 6: Winter 2006

Introduction

You will have noted that this issue has a new editor. This is because our Grey Partridge Biologist, Stephen Browne, moved on this summer to an exciting new post with Flora and Fauna International in Cambridge. We wish Stephen all the best for the future, especially as he will be working with some extremely rare tropical forest gamebirds, inhabiting malarial swamps and land-mine strewn uplands. Suddenly, working in Norfolk looks less stressful! We also thank Stephen for all his hard work for the cause of wild grey partridges. Stephen will be replaced by Francis Buner, currently our Westminster Overseas Research Fellow, working on restocking.

This is my first and last stint as editor so please enjoy this unique issue!

Nick Sotherton
Director of Research

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Public sector funding success

In issue five, we reported on the loss of the public funding we had enjoyed from Defra's Environmental Action Fund (EAF) once the administration transferred from Defra to English Nature. Well, we are now pleased to announce Ian Lindsay's success at attracting over £100,000 over the next three years from Defra's Vocational Training Scheme. The monies will help us support the existing network of partridge groups in England and launch new ones in 2007.

But wait a minute!

We also reported on Nick Sotherton's success in attracting funds to support a partridge group within our local Area of Outstanding Beauty (AONB). Since then Ian Lindsay repeated the success with three other successful applications to

AONBs where partridge groups are based. However, because of the success of the application to the VTS and duplication of funding sources, we are faced with the decision that we have to give back the AONB money! Currently Nick and Ian are undergoing a period of mourning (we don't give money back in the GCT) but they are also devising plans (cunning plans) to offer other services to the AONBs where we can help promote biodiversity in these special areas.

Newcastle disease

On 13 October Newcastle disease was confirmed in partridges on a farm in East Lothian, Scotland. Newcastle disease is a highly contagious viral disease of birds that is transmitted primarily through direct contact between healthy birds and the bodily discharges of infected birds. Virus-

bearing material can also be picked up on shoes and clothing and carried from an infected flock to a healthy one. Possible routes of transmission include contact between poultry and also through movements of contaminated vehicles, equipment, manure feed and water. The virus can survive for several weeks in a warm and humid environment on birds' feathers, manure, and other materials.

Maintaining good biosecurity is essential for everyone involved where there is poultry or the rearing/releasing of gamebirds. For more information visit the disease fact sheet on the Defra website (www.defra.gov.uk), or the Scottish Executive biosecurity guidance at: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/915/0040726.pdf>

Special thanks to all those individuals, gamekeepers, landowners and estates, who have contributed to the Partridge Count Scheme.



The first Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) target, 2005 mixed success

The first BAP target for the grey partridge was to halt the national decline by 2005. The data that verify this are produced from The British Trust for Ornithology's (BTO) Breeding Bird Survey and the results for 2005 were not made available until June 2006. When the results came out, the national data showed that grey partridges had still declined by 14% between 2004 and 2005. Although disappointing, we are not deterred by this result.

It took the grey partridge just 40 years to decline from an estimated million pairs down to their current state of conservation concern, and as Nicholas Aebischer explains: "Partridge recovery is not going to happen overnight." However, this iconic bird is fighting back and with schemes such as our national Partridge Count Scheme, the setting up of regional groups to share best practice, combined with new research being carried out by our scientists into re-establishing the species, this once familiar farmland bird should eventually become common once more.

If we consult our own Grey Partridge Count Scheme, the news is much more

optimistic. This year, in certain regions across the country, many participants have met or exceeded their (BAP) targets for grey partridge. These areas include:

- East Anglia - 57% of participants have met or exceeded their BAP target.
- East Midlands - 57% of participants have met or exceeded their target.
- Eastern Scotland - 63% have met or exceeded their target.
- North-east England - 59% have met or exceeded their target.
- South-east England - 64% have met or exceeded their target.
- West Midlands - 28% have met or exceeded their target.

Grey partridges are still showing a decline in unmanaged areas, but where farmers and landowners are carrying out positive management, such as improving nesting and brood-rearing habitats, increasing food supplies and protecting nests from predators, then grey partridges are responding very well.



By carrying out positive management and improving nesting and brood-rearing habitats, grey partridges are responding.



(Alexis de la Serre)

Our data come from a self-selected sample - farmers who have decided to improve conditions for greys. The BTO data are collected from random farmland plots and this probably explains the difference. But soon, with enough committed farmers, the influence of their best practice will extend to unmanaged areas and even those plots counted by BTO volunteers.

We now need more people to join the Partridge Count Scheme to ensure that this encouraging uplift ripples across all of the grey partridge's former range. As the national figure for grey partridges, which is collated by the BTO, is still recording a decline, we cannot afford to be complacent. See page 5 for more details on how to join the Partridge Count Scheme.

A wealth of winners



Christopher Boreham of Dreweatt Neate awards Richard Illingworth (right) the grey partridge trophy for the Wessex region. (Sophia Gallia)



David Clark (left) accepting the Norfolk trophy on behalf of the Sandringham keepers from Justin Ripman of Mills & Reeve.



Mark Tufnell (left), Chairman of the Cotswolds grey partridge group, presenting the Ruffer-sponsored Cotswolds Group trophy to Bill and Sally Spence.

Some grey partridge groups have managed to gain sponsorship for a trophy to be awarded to a group member who had not only returned grey partridge count forms to us showing an increase in numbers, but who also, was felt by the judges, to have put the most effort into conserving grey partridges and their habitat. The details of prizes, sponsors and winners for 2006 are given below (Table 1)

The rules regarding entry for the annual awards are:

1. The award is open to all participants of the Grey Partridge Count Scheme - large estate or small farm, kept or not.
2. Count forms must be fully completed to be eligible for a chance to win the trophy.
3. Anyone who fully completes and returns to the Trust three consecutive seasonal count forms (this is to allow the judges to properly quantify partridge increases) will automatically be eligible for the current year's trophy. Spring counts to be returned no later than 15 May and autumn counts no later than 15 November to qualify.
4. We will shortlist those who have increased partridge numbers (with some allowance where numbers are small). Three or four farms or estates will be selected, based on relative increases and evidence of habitat management, and these will be visited by the judges. The award will be given to the farm or estate which, in the opinion of the judges, has put in the most effort on behalf of grey partridges and their survival. Emphasis is on effort not necessarily on money expended.
5. If the award is given to a large estate, it will be the estate which wins the award, not an individual beat, although the judges may look at only one beat given the time restraints.
6. The award will not be given to the same farm or estate more than once in three years.
7. The winning keeper or owner will be part of the judging panel in the following year.

Table 1

Grey partridge group trophies

Group	Prize	Sponsor	Winner
Lincolnshire	Silver partridge	Jas Martin & Co	Martin Simpson, Ancaster
Cotswolds	Silver partridge by Patrick Mavros	Ruffer	Bill Spence, Ashbury
Norfolk	Silver partridge by Tim Clayton	Mills & Reeve, Solicitors	Sandringham Keepers
Wessex	Bronze partridge by Bill Prickett	Dreweatt Neate	Richard Illingworth, Whitcombe
Northumberland	Bronze partridge by Bill Prickett	The Glenlivet, part of the Pernod Ricard Group	Kevin McCaig, Alnwick
East Lothian	Bronze partridge by Bill Prickett	Dods of Haddington Ltd	Starting 2007
Durham & North Dales	Bronze partridge by Bill Prickett	Gray's Chartered Surveyors	Starting 2007

The Partridge Count Scheme

The results of this year's autumn counts of grey partridges by the members of the Partridge Count Scheme (PCS) are summarised below (Table 2). The number of sites registered with the scheme now stands at 1,864.

We had anticipated a rapid harvest following the hot dry summer months in most regions and sent out count forms early. In typical British form, the fine

weather ended, with subsequent delays in counting in many places. Nevertheless, at the time of printing 833 (45% of the 1,864 PCS members) returned a count this autumn. This is slightly down on last year; when a total of 870 autumn counts were returned. The total number of greys counted is up on last year from 40,206 in 2005 to 41,726 in 2006. Taking the country as a whole, densities this year

appear slightly up on last year; with an average density of 20 birds per 100 ha (247 acres) in 2005 and currently an average of 22.6 birds per 100 ha in 2006. The highest density recorded so far this autumn was in Norfolk with over 250 birds per 100 ha. Although this figure may seem unattainable for many participants, Norfolk has a long-established history of managing the land for wild greys and achieving high numbers sustainably. Although densities are generally up, this was not the case in all regions. Densities were quite a bit lower in southern England with higher average densities found in the Midlands, eastern and northern England and densities in Scotland similar to last year. This season's young-to-old ratios (a simple measure of yearly chick production) have not changed substantially from last year; with again slightly higher figures in Scotland. The importance of the provision of suitable brood-rearing cover (and appropriate predator control) in increasing the number of chicks cannot be overstated. Free fact sheets on brood-rearing cover and chick-food favourites can be downloaded from www.gct.org.uk/partridge or call Neville Kingdon on 01425 651066.

With participants returning their counts from the Scottish Highlands to Cornwall, from drained fen to moorland fringe, the PCS is now one of the largest farmer-led wildlife monitoring schemes in Europe and reflects well on the enthusiasm of the participants (busy farmers, keepers, or land managers) actively to make a difference. We hope that all those participating will continue and also encourage others to join. All eyes are on land managers, so it is increasingly important to demonstrate to policymakers the results of the effort made by PCS participants for the grey partridge.

Many will be aware of the latest BTO figures for grey partridges. The BTO/JNCC/RSPB Breeding Bird Survey (2005) showed that the national grey partridge population is still declining. They found an overall decline in abundance of 14% from 2004 to 2005, with numbers



Table 2

Results from the Partridge Count Scheme for autumn 2005 and 2006

Region	Number of sites*		Young-to-old ratio**		Autumn density*** (birds per 100 ha)	
	2005	2006	2005	2006	2005	2006
South	162	148	1.7	1.8	9.9	7.5
Eastern	227	223	2.3	2.3	28.0	33.9
Midlands	160	144	2.0	2.1	14.8	16.0
Wales	2	2	-	-	0	0
Northern	172	172	3.1	2.7	23.9	29.1
Scotland	147	144	2.5	3.0	20.2	20.4
Overall	870	833	2.4	2.4	20.0	22.6

* The number that returned any information, even zero counts.

** Calculated from estates where at least one adult grey partridge was counted.

*** From those estates that reported the area they had counted.

declining by 40% from 1994 to 2005. Only 9% of surveyed Breeding Bird Survey sites (2,879 km² or 287,900 ha) had grey partridges in 2005. This is contrary to what has been happening on areas registered within the PCS, where instead of declining, grey partridge numbers nationally have increased. PCS members have recorded a **15%** increase in grey pairs between 2004 and 2005 with nearly a **40%** increase since 2000. The PCS spring counts from 2005 covered 3,165 km² or 316,500 ha) on mainly cropped land in lowland Britain; this works out at just over 5% of the arable area (total of 57,770 km² or 5,777,000 ha) of the UK (Defra, 2005). A total of 9,848 grey partridge spring pairs were counted, comprising 15% of the 65,000 spring pairs of the estimated UK population. The BTO survey samples selected areas randomly across the UK, whereas the PCS results are from those farms and estates that are actively seeking

to increase numbers of the bird. As such, it is encouraging that those who are trying to make a difference are doing so, but discouraging not to see the results of these efforts rippling across the countryside in general.

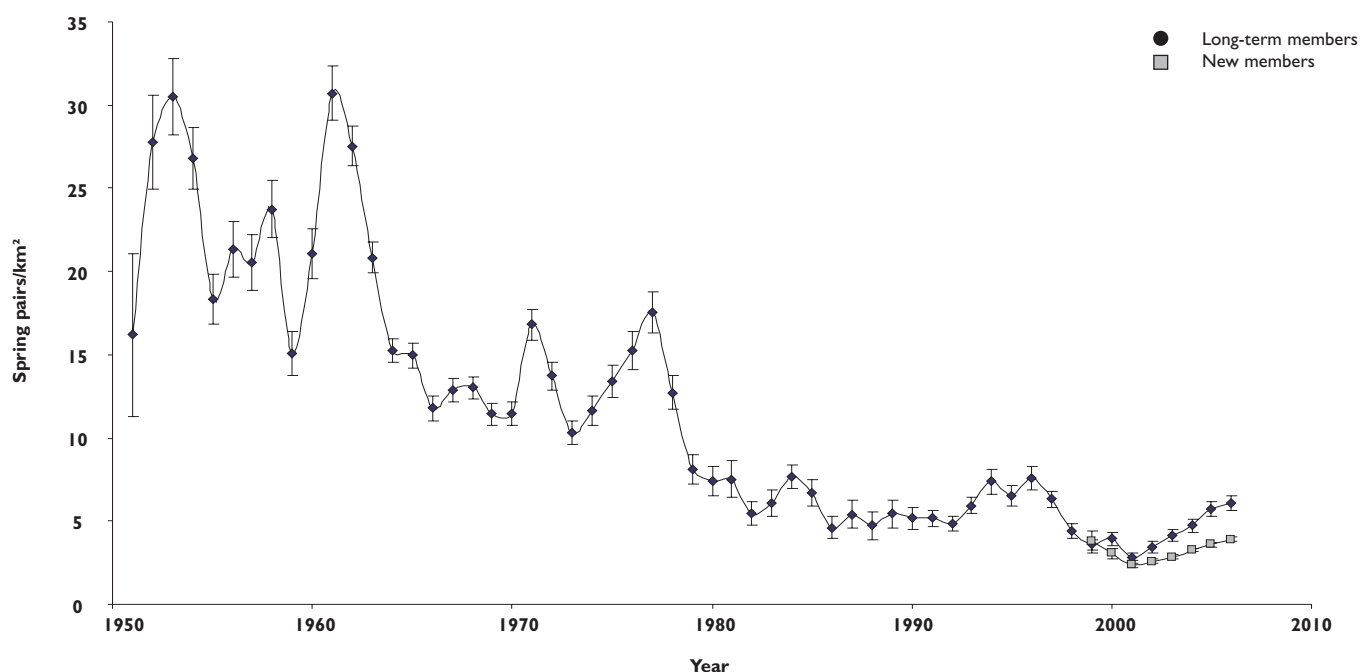
Even with the encouraging signs continuing from the PCS counts (Figure 1) grey partridge recovery is not going to happen overnight. But with information available with the PCS, plus the continuing expansion of our regional partridge groups (see pages 7 and 8), this once familiar farmland bird should become common once more.

It is vital that farmers, shoot and estate managers etc, are aware of their importance in the future of the grey partridge and become active counting members of the PCS. We need many more registered individuals to count and to participate. If you are already undertaking counts please encourage your neighbours to follow suit. The scheme is free and involves just a few

hours per year to count partridges on your land (even if you have only an occasional pair). In return, we offer extensive advice on habitat and other management techniques, and spread practical information through regional grey partridge groups across the country. Remember that 'Everyone One Counts'. For further information, our free management fact sheets or to join the PCS, visit our website: www.gct.org.uk/partridge or contact Neville Kingdon on 01425 651066 or email nkingdon@gct.org.uk

Figure 1

Changes through time in grey partridge spring pair density indices on PCS sites. The results control for site effects and are displayed separately for long-term and recently joined members of the PCS.



The Grey Partridge Recovery Project Update (Royston)

The grey partridge recovery project at Royston has just completed its fourth year with encouraging results. The demonstration area consists of six farms across 1,000 hectares of farmland, where the results of all our research shown to benefit grey partridges is being applied to some degree.

Following the dry spring, with water reserves in the south/south-east being at their lowest for 70 years, late spring game counts (which did not finish until early April) showed a promising increase, particularly with the grey partridges on the 1,000-hectare area kept by Malcolm Brockless. The 2006 spring count revealed 130 pairs of grey partridges (18 pairs more than last year) and compared with an estimate of 29 pairs when the project began. Brown hares are everywhere,

pheasants and redlegs are also doing well, despite the fact that we are trying to keep the pheasants to a minimum. Post-harvest counts this year revealed a total of 876 grey partridges (269 more than last year), 245 of which were old and 631 young (compared with 206 old and 401 young last year). This represents an increase of 44%. The autumn counts also revealed 773 redlegs and 522 pheasants (a reduction on last year's 612 pheasants).

After a dry April (25 mm of rain), May turned into the wettest for 20 years with 105 mm falling on Royston. Although for most of the time it was warm and should have been perfect for drilling game crops, the first brood of day-old pheasants was seen on 10 June. June was dry with only 37.5 mm of rain, most of which fell on the

13 June (26 mm). The first brood of grey partridges were seen on 9 June and the first brood of redlegs on 10 June. On the whole, the month was ideal for gamebird chicks and by the end of June an estimated 48 broods of pheasants, 13 broods of greys and nine broods of redleg partridges were present.

July was a very hot month with 31°C on 2 July and 19 July was the hottest day (34°C) since 1911. Swathing winter rape started on 5 July and the winter barley harvest started on the project area on 13 July. Weather was perfect for game until Royston was hit with the worst thunderstorm possible. A deluge of 75 mm of rain with hailstones fell in about five hours but, unbelievably, most of the game, even late redlegs, came through it!

A lot of rain in mid-August brought the wheat harvest to a halt, which resulted in some farms still having standing wheat at the end of the month. This delayed the final autumn game counts but these have now been completed.

All things considered, the target of 18.6 pairs of partridges per 100 ha predicted on the basis of landscape management looks achievable in 2008, if the increase in the spring pair density on the demonstration area continues at a rate similar to the one observed so far (Table 3). We expect that the increased autumn densities on the demonstration area in 2006 (Table 4) will feed through to a spring pair density of 17 pairs per 100 ha or better.

Well done Malcolm Brockless and a big thank you to all the farmers on the areas for allowing us access to conduct this important work.

Table 3

Number of grey partridges counted on the demonstration area of the Grey Partridge Recovery Project in spring

Spring	Grey partridges (pairs per 100 ha)	Red-legged partridges (pairs per 100 ha)
2002	2.9	4.9
2003	5.1	6.6
2004	8.0	13.2
2005	11.2	18.9
2006	13.0	15.4
Target	18.6	18.6

Table 4

Number of grey partridges counted on the demonstration area of the Grey Partridge Recovery Project in autumn

Autumn	Grey partridges		Red-legged partridges	
	Y:O	Density (birds per 100 ha)	Y:O	Density (birds per 100 ha)
2001	0.6	7.6	0.3	15.7
2002	3.0	28.8	1.1	18.4
2003	2.9	29.0	2.2	43.9
2004	2.8	53.4	1.2	43.9
2005	1.9	60.8	0.9	58.4
2006	2.6	87.8	1.5	77.5

Regional round-up - Partridge, Pint and Pie

Partridge, Pint and Pie

A simple formula and generous Saffery Champness sponsorship have helped The Game Conservancy Trust grey partridge recovery programme to be broadcast to an increasing number of land managers, advisors and Scottish Executive Environment and Rural Affairs Department (SEERAD) officials. This year's event at Fearn Farm on the Black Isle, by kind permission of James Scott and his family, was another sell-out.

Ian McCall described the key requirements to enhance habitat for wild grey partridges, and especially nesting, brood-rearing and winter cover in northern Scotland. Our recent research in the Scottish lowlands has demonstrated that many other arable and grassland species benefit from partridge-friendly farming, with corn buntings and brown hares being two of the most obvious. Consequently, funding for prescriptions such as extended hedgerows, ditch margin management, unharvested cereal-based crop mixtures and bird-friendly mowing of grass is now available through SEERAD's agri-environment schemes. Gillian McKnight, Scottish Agricultural College's (SAC) Inverness-based Conservation Consultant, outlined the details of payments available, emphasising the close working relationship between Game Conservancy Limited's Advisory Services and SAC. Together they offer a unique package providing both the latest techniques to improve land for grey partridges, together with help on preparing funding applications.

The major part of these evenings is always a farm tour to view and discuss partridge-friendly measures. Fearn has plenty to see, with miles of ditches bordered by tussock grasses providing perfect partridge nesting cover. The partridge enthusiasts and the officials inspected two strips of brood-rearing cover, the first vividly illustrating the problems of trying to establish crop mixtures year after year on the same ground with no herbicides permitted. As so often happens, the weed burden had become so dense as to be almost impenetrable to foraging gamebird chicks. Having three local SEERAD officials present

allowed a healthy debate on how minor agri-environment rule changes could improve matters. It also illustrated the gulf between Pentland House where the rules and regulations are hatched and practicalities on the real, as opposed to the virtual, farm!

With two trailers of loud chattering partridge enthusiasts, no partridges were seen on the tour, but success was demonstrated when James Scott told us that the combine driver had seen three separate partridge broods in the first field of winter barley cut, numbering 12, 14 and 15. That went down almost as well as the hot pies and cold pints from Scotland's champion pie maker and a local Scottish brewery.

South-east Scotland

Our Scotland team of Hugo Straker and Katrina Candy put on a detailed display on grey partridge conservation at the International Sheep Dog Society's Centenary event at Charterhall Estate in Berwickshire from 14-16 September. Our stand was visited by both HRH Princess Anne and Scotland's First Minister, Jack McConnell, where they saw live partridges alongside a comprehensive game crop display highlighting key crop components

that make up nesting, brood-rearing and winter holding cover. The seed for this display were kindly donated by John Watson Seeds Ltd.

On 1 November, partridge enthusiasts assembled for the launch of the East Lothian Grey Partridge Trophy Annual Award. The trophy, a magnificent life-sized, bronze resin grey partridge by Bill Prickett, is being sponsored by local seed merchants Dods of Haddington Limited. Hugo Straker co-ordinated the launch and congratulated the audience on their achievements to date. In spring 2006, 9,000 hectares out of 31,000 hectares of optimal partridge ground were counted, ie. 29% of the area, with partridge numbers edging towards the East Lothian BAP target of 1,200 pairs. Several new farmers enrolled on the national Partridge Count Scheme, which now means that over 25% of East Lothian's farmers are counting their partridges. The trophy will be awarded annually from 2007 to help publicise the importance of achieving the BAP target numbers for the grey partridge in East Lothian. For further details please contact Hugo Straker on 01 620 830230 or email hstraker@gct.org.uk



Hugo Straker with the East Lothian grey partridge trophy, which is kindly sponsored by Dods of Haddington Limited and will be awarded for the first time in 2007.

Regional round-up continued

We now have nine grey partridge regional groups established in England, with the latest additions launched so far this year being the East Anglian group (covering Essex, Suffolk, Hertfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Bedfordshire), which was launched at the Duke of Sutherland's Stetchworth Estate near Newmarket, and the Durham and Northern Dales group, which was launched at Lord Barnard's Raby Castle Estate. Both launches were well attended with the East Anglian group attracting nearly 100 participants. We have more launches planned for 2007, with perhaps the largest being the start of a Yorkshire group to cover this important grey partridge area.

Existing groups have also been busy with many, such as the Northumberland, Cotswold and Wessex groups, holding training sessions on 'insects for grey partridge chicks'. People learnt how to establish insect-rich chick foraging areas, and also had a chance to sweep-net insects for themselves and attempt to identify them! The newly formed south-east group (Kent, Surrey and Sussex) held an intensive (everything-you-need-to-know-day) on Harry Goring's farm in the middle of our Sussex study area, where so much of our understanding of

grey partridge biology was first formulated by Dick Potts and his team starting in 1968.

Northumberland

The autumn meeting took place in October at the Pallinsburn Estate owned by George Farr. A presentation on the importance of winter holding cover and feeding by Mike Mckendry followed a delicious lunch.

The group's chairman, the Duke of Northumberland, presented the grey partridge trophy, kindly sponsored by 'The Glenlivet'. This year's winner came as no surprise to those assembled, as the Duke's partridge keeper, Kevin McCaig, has transformed an intensively farmed area to the east of the A1 near Alnwick into what is becoming a partridge Mecca.

In an effort to walk off the apple crumble, a tour of Pallinsburn Estate followed. Discussions were led by George Farr, Mike Mckendry and Richard Barnes from Kings, and George's keeper Kevin. There was plenty to discuss from weed burden problems to partridge translocation.

The group is looking for a volunteer with hill-fringe partridges to host the spring meeting in 2007. Please contact Lynda Ferguson on 01425 651013.

Durham and North Dales

The Durham and Northern Dales grey partridge group was launched on Wednesday 11 October at Raby Castle, County Durham. The event was chaired by Malise Graham, a local farmer, shot and grey partridge enthusiast. Peter Thompson spoke about the Partridge Count Scheme and the necessity for the shooting and farming fraternity to work with us in delivering the BAP target of 150,000 pairs by 2010. Mike McKendry then gave a presentation on the key habitat requirements of the grey partridge and how to provide them using the agri-environment schemes. A walk round one beat of the low-ground shoot allowed the group to see these key habitats in place.

Our thanks to Lord Barnard for his generosity in allowing us to use the Castle and thanks also to Lindsay Waddell (Headkeeper), Iain Alexander and the whole team at Raby Castle. Finally we would like to thank David Gray of Gray's Chartered Surveyors for sponsoring the trophy, which was on display as an impetus to all who attended to win it!

Grey partridge management days are kindly sponsored by **Saffery Champness**
CHARTERED ACCOUNTANTS



Ian Lindsay talking to the North-West Grey Partridge Group



For more information on our grey partridge research and further copies of this newsletter, please contact:

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