



# Grey partridge News

Issue 11: Summer 2009

## Introduction

The weather was reasonably fair during Ascot week, with only a few localised thundery downpours dotted around the country, and although the weather has now taken a turn for the worse, I am still hopeful that this will be an excellent breeding year. I am very encouraged by the number of insects everywhere, so hopefully lack of food will not be an issue. Perhaps, we are going to have a really fantastic grey partridge breeding season to make up for the last two dreadful summers – maybe even a return to 1976!

I have already heard of some good broods in the eastern counties and pheasants also seem to be doing well, with some advanced youngsters seen across the country. I have visited a reasonable number of places over the last few months that now have all the ingredients on the ground to provide the year-round requirements for good wild grey partridge production – they have all just been waiting for a little help from the vagaries of the British weather!

When reading the article on page 2 you will see that we all need to give more thought about how we provide better late winter and spring cover for greys to help them avoid predation, especially from sparrowhawks. Far too many of us are replacing all our cover crops every year, rather than renewing just half of them. This sudden loss of cover after the shooting season leaves partridges incredibly vulnerable to predation as they have been relying on the cover for survival. We must all plan to provide a much better network of escape cover in the form of uncut grass, second-year crops such as kale, chicory and sweet clover and even areas of more permanent low-cut scrub or bramble.

Next year we should be nearing the Government's target of 90,000 pairs of grey partridges across the country. It is unlikely that we will meet this target, despite so many working extremely hard to try and do so. But, if we have a successful breeding summer this year and you ALL do your autumn counts and send them into us, we may surprise ourselves by how near we are to this target. More importantly, especially if we do fall short, we will be able to demonstrate to those in authority just how many of you have taken up the cause by showing them the count data – but we can only do this if you do the counts and return the forms! I really do hope that when I sit down to write the introduction for the next newsletter, that we have all counted plenty of good sized coveys across the country, giving you some reward for all your endeavours.

Peter Thompson  
Biodiversity Advisor

### Inside this issue:

**Page 1-2...**

Introduction;  
Where are our partridges going?

**Page 3...**

Grey Partridge Recovery Project;  
The South-West Farmland  
Bird Initiative

**Page 4-5...**


The Partridge Count Scheme;  
75th anniversary

**Page 6-7...**

Voluntary set-aside;  
Agri-environment schemes and  
grey partridges

**Page 8...**

Regional roundup; Contacts



*An example of good second-year kale in February.  
Are you providing enough late winter and spring cover  
for your grey partridges?*

[www.gwct.org.uk](http://www.gwct.org.uk)

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



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*Partridge Count Scheme*

# Where are our partridges going?

In our last newsletter we raised the problem of winter losses, especially the widely observed phenomenon of grey partridges disappearing come February. Given our experience at the Grey Partridge Recovery Project at Royston, the very high standard of gamekeeping there, as well as winter cover habitat above the national average, we were under the impression that this was largely due to dispersal. Well, how wrong we were!

In December 2008 we radio-tagged 64 wild partridges and since then located them at least once every week. To our satisfaction, until the end of January none of the tagged birds had left the area where they were caught and none of them died, despite the obvious presence of sparrowhawk females hunting in the area. Coveys started to break up on 23 January and by 6 February all of our 28 radio-tagged females were seen in pairs. At the same time eight of our 36 tagged cocks began dispersing in search of a mate as they were still single due to a shortage of females. These were all sub-adult birds hatched in 2008. Only one of these survived this process and he moved six kilometres away remaining single until the beginning of the breeding season. All other dispersing males were predated, as well as the only dispersing hen (also sub-adult), which dispersed with a cock bird, as a pair. Apart from these nine birds, all other radio-tagged individuals (86%) remained

within a distance of 1km from where they were captured, with an astounding 73% within a radius of only 500 metres.

Thanks to our previous year's count data we expected a winter loss of around 58%, but the nine birds that dispersed accounted for only 14%. Much to our surprise the majority of the rest of the birds were predated by raptors. The most likely culprits were sparrowhawks as we didn't spot any other raptors in the area, apart from buzzards. By the end of April, 24 birds (40%) were killed by raptors and nine (15%) were probably scavenged, most likely by foxes. In other words, between February and April, 55% of the population was killed by predators, mainly sparrowhawks! This is all the more remarkable given the fact that none of these birds had died until the end of January. It is striking, however, that all the losses began as soon as the coveys started to break up. As a consequence, the pairs moved from the safety of the middle of the stubble fields towards the edges and along the hedges where it might be easier to spot and predate them. However, it might also be that the raptors changed their 'preferred' prey species. This is less likely as you would expect them to hunt whatever they come across, as foxes do.

Our initial findings confirm the importance of winter stubbles and other widely used cover crops such as rape and game cover strips while partridges forage

in coveys. However, the data also indicate that this cover provides less protection during the pre-laying period between February and May. Winter rape is generally an excellent cover type but once damaged by the pigeons it can become completely useless. Game crops are usually removed after the shooting season in February or provide less and less cover as they slowly collapse as the season progresses. Additionally, hedge management can affect the cover a hedge provides, especially if the bottom of the hedge is thin owing to rabbit damage or bramble removal for example. In these cases it might be wise to provide an additional cover strip of up to six metres alongside a hedgerow such as a wild bird seed mixture containing species such as kale, chicory or sweet clover as the dominant cover crop. At Royston, all of these problems with cover came together this winter.

Owing to the anecdotal character of only one field season and one study site so far, more research is needed to verify that our findings were not the result of the unusually cold and snowy winter; before a general conclusion can be drawn. We intend to repeat this study this coming winter, continue to monitor the grey partridges at the time the coveys break up and hopefully, also radio-track some of the local sparrowhawks as well!

*Radio-tracking partridges at Royston.*



# Grey Partridge Recovery Project Update

For the second year in a row the number of grey partridges declined this spring on the Grey Partridge Demonstration Project at Royston (see Figure 1). Malcolm Brockless counted 118 pairs (density of 11.8 pairs per 100 hectares) on the demonstration area, compared with 158 pairs in spring 2008 and 184 pairs in 2007 (density of 15.8 and 18.4 per 100 hectares, respectively). As in 2007, the chick survival rate last summer was low, 31% (compared with an average of 48% over 2002-2006), but it was the low over-winter survival in 2008/09 (34%, as compared with 40 to 42% over previous years) that appears to be mostly to blame for this spring's low count. Poor crop growth over winter, with difficulties in establishment, especially of winter rape, meant that there was little winter cover available for the birds. (See page 2 for further discussion of problems with winter/spring survival of grey partridges at Royston.)

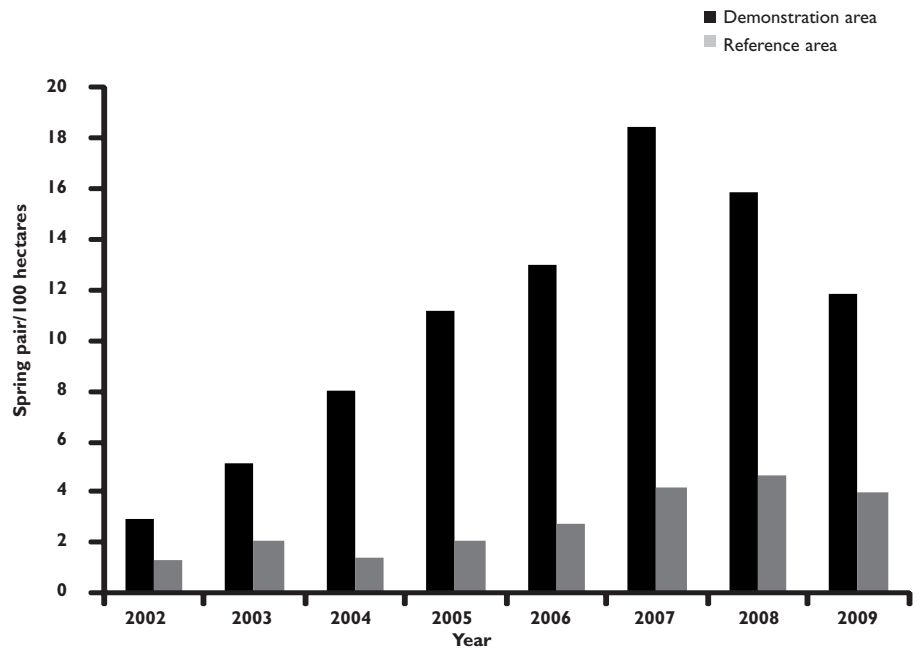
This year's breeding season is a particularly important one to turn the situation around. With this April being one of the sunniest, driest and warmest on record and May also dry, warm and sunny, we were off to a good start, with the first pheasant brood seen on 10 May. In early June we did have some significant rainfall, with 20mm falling on 7 June but the end of

the month was very warm. The first brood of red-legs was seen on 10 June, and the first brood of greys (though they were one week old at the time) was recorded on 14 June. At the end of June, with temperatures high, we have seen six broods of grey

partridges, eight of red-legs and 10 pheasant broods. Early signs from areas harvested on the demonstration project in July seem to indicate that chick survival has been good, with a total of 29 grey partridge, 37 red-leg and 45 pheasant broods seen so far.

**Figure 1**

Density of spring pairs of grey partridge on the demonstration and reference areas within the Grey Partridge Recovery Project from 2002 to 2009.



## The South West Farmland Bird Initiative

An initiative has been set up in the south-west of England by Natural England to look at the effect of directly targeting stewardship scheme options at six nationally important bird species associated with arable farmland: lapwing, grey partridge, turtle dove, yellow wagtail, tree sparrow and corn bunting. Four key areas have been chosen (the Cotswolds, North Wessex Downs, south Wiltshire and Dorset) because they have been shown to hold important populations of farmland birds and other wildlife. A wide range of organisations are involved including FWAG, RSPB, local ANOBs and ourselves. Three full-time advisors have been employed to target, advise and help farmers choose options to help farmland birds. The project will monitor the success or otherwise of this 'pro-active'



An initiative has been set up to target stewardship scheme options at farmland birds such as the grey partridge, lapwing and corn bunting.

approach to rolling out the stewardship scheme, both in up-take and quality of the habitats implemented. It will also look at the effect this might have on given populations of certain species of birds, for instance the

grey partridge. The Government is watching closely to see how this initiative works and the outcomes may well influence how the stewardship schemes are run in the future. Watch out for further up-dates.

# Partridge Count Scheme

The results from this year's spring grey partridge counts are summarised in Table 1. Thank you to everyone who took part in the Partridge Count Scheme (PCS) this season. Despite the snowy start in February that kept birds undercover; counting began with a dry sunny March (the exception being a wetter northern Scotland) although increased scattered heavy showers and thunderstorms limited counting in later spring. With limited time in which to count, unfavourable weather plays havoc when trying to fit in counting around farming or other responsibilities. It is hoped that the national and regional details given here will further encourage everyone to find out how well their partridge broods have done this summer.

Despite the weather it is heartening to have received 817 spring counts, which although down from 879 in spring 2008 (-7%), is less than the decline in the counts of the previous spring (-14%). The total area counted was 236,600 hectares (584,600 acres), 22,400 hectares less than in 2008 with the average area counted 294 hectares (726 acres). The average area counted has remained fairly stable over the past three years, between 290-295 hectares.

The total number of partridges counted is down compared with last spring, with a total of 7,103 pairs compared with 7,885 pairs in spring 2008 (-10%). Yet despite this apparent fall, it is encouraging that the average density overall, as reported in Table 1, has actually increased slightly. Examining the long-term index of grey partridge density (see Figure 2) reveals that this is due to

**Table 1**  
Regional spring pair densities of grey partridges in Great Britain for 2008 and 2009

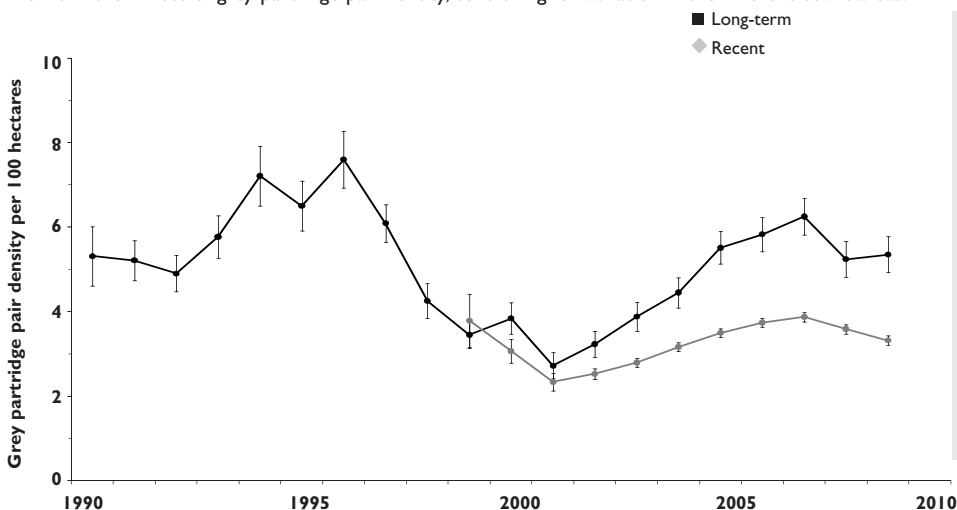
| Region         | Number of sites |            | Change       | Spring pair density per 100ha |            | Comparison    |
|----------------|-----------------|------------|--------------|-------------------------------|------------|---------------|
|                | 2008            | 2009       |              | 2008                          | 2009       |               |
| Southern       | 145             | 133        | (-8%)        | 1.6                           | 1.5        | (-6%) ↓       |
| Eastern        | 226             | 204        | (-10%)       | 5.0                           | 5.7        | (14%) ↑       |
| Midlands       | 159             | 154        | (-3%)        | 3.1                           | 3.2        | (3%) ↑        |
| Wales          | 3               | 3          | (0%)         | 0.9                           | 0.9        | (0%) →        |
| Northern       | 201             | 192        | (-4%)        | 4.6                           | 4.9        | (7%) ↑        |
| Scotland       | 145             | 131        | (-10%)       | 3.4                           | 2.7        | (-20%) ↓      |
| <b>Overall</b> | <b>879</b>      | <b>817</b> | <b>(-7%)</b> | <b>3.7</b>                    | <b>3.8</b> | <b>(3%)</b> ↑ |

a slight increase in densities recorded by long-term PCS members (an increase of 2% compared with a dramatic -16% last year); demonstrating that where ample and effective habitat and management is provided, partridges can be quick to respond. Offsetting this good news is a drop in pair density (-7%) for the second year recorded by the recent PCS members (those joining since 1999) who make up the majority of PCS involvement. To help increase pair densities, chick survival and over-winter survival in particular need to be addressed. We know that chick survival was low last summer - 34% while over-winter survival was only 54% on average. PCS members need to make a concentrated effort to increase both these measures. For site-specific advice call our Advisory Service on 01425 651013.

Looking in greater detail at the proportion of PCS members that recorded the type of habitat they supply (see Figure 3), provision of both over-winter cover and brood-rearing cover was not as widespread as hoped. Only half of PCS members recorded providing game cover crops, with 48% of members planting mixes designed for over-winter cover; while even fewer had brood-rearing cover – a mere 30%. Again, only 30% of PCS members reported utilising beetle banks, but provision of conservation headlands, which produce plentiful insects immediately after hatching, was higher than expected when considering national figures in Entry Level Stewardship (ELS), with approximately 45% of participants utilising them. Although the conservation headland result gives grounds for optimism, it remains low compared

**Figure 2**

Trends in the indices of grey partridge pair density, controlling for variation in the different count areas.



**Comparing Table 1 and Figure 2**

Readers will note the disparity between the results of Table 1 and Figure 2. More complex analysis is used to produce Figure 2 which, unlike Table 1, looks at the between-year changes within each site, then averages those changes across sites. This adjusts for the fact that counts are not available for all sites every year and includes only sites with more than one spring count. This gives a more accurate long-term overview than is provided from Table 1.

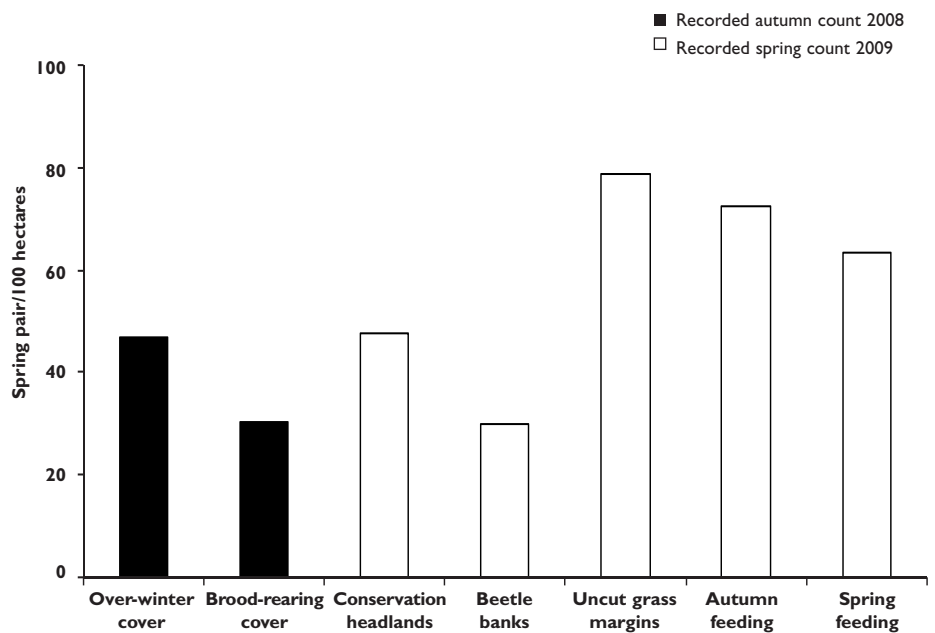


with the 70 - 80% of PCS members who have uncut grass margins and/or autumn feeding. There is also some evidence that grass margins may be detrimental to nest survival (further details of agri-environment options are reported on page 6-7). It would be more beneficial to provide both brood habitat (cereal-based game cover and conservation headlands) and over-winter cover (appropriate game cover and thoughtful use of arable cropping).

The PCS still needs many more readers (GWCT members or not) to participate, regardless of how many or how few birds you have – Every One Counts! Get involved or encourage your neighbours to join! For more information contact Neville Kingdon on 01425 651066 or nkingdon@gwct.org.uk

**Figure 3**

Percentage of partridge habitat/management used as recorded by PCS members



## Celebrating 75 years of partridge counting!



*Celebrating 75 years of partridge counting. Pictured: (from left to right), The Hon Michael Willoughby, Birdsall Estate, David Clark of the Sandringham Estate, Mrs Teresa Dent, GWCT Chief Executive, Helen Phillips, Chief Executive, Natural England, David Woods (underkeeper) Northumberland Estate, David Jackson, Malton.*

This year we are celebrating the 75th anniversary of the PCS and to commemorate this landmark, we held a birthday party at the CLA Game Fair at Belvoir Castle.

The party was a huge success and helped to further raise awareness about the importance of partridge counting. Our marquee was packed with a wide-ranging number of guests, including MPs, conservation organisations such as RSPB, members of the press, our members and of course members of the PCS and our regional groups.

As part of the celebration, Helen Phillips, Chief Executive of Natural England, kindly agreed to present our special 75th anniversary awards to the four worthy winners. These included:

1. The Birdsall Estate, North Yorkshire (The Hon Michael Willoughby). In recognition of its long-term commitment and goodwill to partridge conservation over 75 years.
2. David Clark and The Sandringham Estate, Norfolk. For the largest, successive number of partridge counts since 1951 and acknowledgment of the

importance of partridge monitoring to partridge management and conservation.

3. Garry Whitfield, the Northumberland Estate. For the greatest number of counts undertaken and returned each spring and autumn.
4. David Jackson. In recognition of his individual contribution to the PCS over many years.

These 75th anniversary celebrations were kindly sponsored by Ruffer LLP, Strutt & Parker, Jas Martin & Co, Gray's Chartered Surveyors, Carter Jonas, Savills and CastleAcre Insurance.

# Voluntary set-aside and the renewal of ELS

The Government has finally announced that the 'voluntary' approach will be the favoured option in regard to set-aside. We are working closely with Natural England, the National Farmers' Union, the RSPB and others, to ensure that guidance is given to growers to show what the Government feels is the appropriate level of habitat management required across the country, thereby avoiding the introduction of compulsory set-aside in the future.

The first Entry Level Stewardship (ELS) schemes come up for renewal next year as the five-year term of the contract is fulfilled. Hopefully most contracts will be renewed as there are undoubtedly many good conservation options available to help deliver grey partridge habitat requirements on the ground. One of the key changes to the scheme that farmers need to consider is that the 'management plans' have now been dropped and as most will have gained points from these plans, points will now have to be found from other options within the scheme to reach the 30 points per hectare total required.

This could actually be a blessing in disguise because if the scheme had not changed at all, many would simply renew their contracts without making any changes. On a large scale, the Government may feel that not enough was being achieved on the ground and potentially introduce compulsory set-aside. However, if farmers



*In-field options such as beetle banks will provide vital points and are ideal for grey partridges.*

choose 'in-field' options such as 'Wild Bird Seed' and 'Beetle Banks' for example, to make up for the lost points, then this will deliver the management that the Government is looking for in the voluntary approach to set-aside. Also by taking some land out of production it will also benefit farmland biodiversity at the same time. Those who are currently not in any stewardship scheme, including nearly a third of farmers, will need encouragement to enter the ELS scheme, again choosing some of the 'in-field' options as part of their application if compulsory set-aside is to be avoided.

ELS can really help deliver what is needed for grey partridges, as options include establishing nesting, brood-rearing, winter food and cover areas, as well as over-wintering stubbles. If you have not delivered all you need within this scheme, then consideration should be given to the Higher Level Scheme (HLS) as many are finding that this too is an excellent scheme, which has easier entry criteria than 18 months ago.

2010 promises to be an interesting year, and perhaps some positive planning now could well pay dividends at a later stage, we shall see.

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## Agri-environment schemes and partridges

Agri-environmental schemes (AES) have become an ever increasing part of UK agricultural policy. We have, for some time, wanted to see if and how membership in these schemes has benefited grey partridges on PCS sites. This year Natural England gave us the opportunity to do so, by providing us with funds and English AES information to compare with English PCS data. We were able to carry out this analysis while fully preserving the anonymity of our PCS members and the confidentiality of their data. The work looked for an effect on breeding density (spring pair density), grey partridge production (young-to-old ratio and mean brood size) and over-winter survival and retention (over-winter change). Although there were positive effects of AES participation, the most interesting results were found when evaluating the individual AES options that PCS members chose to

implement. Here we indicate which options PCS members should either continue with, avoid altogether or where extra care is needed in how they are managed so that they provide the most benefit for grey partridges.

We classified AES options important for grey partridges into 10 groups, based on the habitats that they provide at different stages in the life of grey partridges (see Table 2). We related changes in the partridge variables listed earlier to the proportion of the area of each PCS site taken up by these options. This analysis essentially looked for 'winner/loser' options at each stage of the grey partridge life cycle (see Table 3).

Three groups of options came out as real winners - **beetle banks**, **conservation headlands** and **wild bird cover**. Unfortunately for grey partridges,

both **beetle banks** and **conservation headlands** have very little up-take within ELS, with 0.04% and 0.16% of points awarded to these options, respectively. The option that was consistently a loser was grass and scrub management, which was perhaps most frequent in areas with less arable land. Five other options were less clear-cut, showing positive relationships with either spring pair density and over-winter change, but negative ones with young-to-old ratio and mean brood size, or vice versa. The secret to achieving success with these options lies in how they are managed and what other options are deployed to offset their negative side. For instance, spring cropping provides good brood-rearing cover, but no cover at all in February-March when grey partridges suffer their highest losses to raptors. Conversely, winter cropping provides good cover in

early spring, but is poor for brood-rearing. To minimise detrimental effects, avoid having either of these in large fields or in a block arrangement. It would be best to use the two options in tandem to complement each other or perhaps use wild bird cover as brood-rearing cover near areas managed with winter cropping. Both young-to-old ratio and brood size were negatively related to the presence of grass strip options. This may be because grass margins can act as corridors for mammalian predators, and predation plays an important role in breeding success. Nesting cover is better provided by **beetle banks**, which are in mid-field and disconnected from field margins. The case for field corner and crop management is less straightforward. Though field corners can provide over-wintering habitat and are related to larger broods in the autumn, large areas led to lower retention of spring pairs. Higher amounts of crop management were related to higher retention of spring pairs, but were also related to lower mean brood sizes. This could be because the payments for having small fields are included in this group of options. Higher edge-to-centre ratios may increase grey partridge numbers during pair formation and nesting, but may also put nests near edges of fields and crops in danger from predators in a similar manner to grass strips. Either way the management of both of these option groups requires further investigation.

Lastly, if we had to give a report on PCS members in general, it would be 'could do better'. Although some members are using stewardship schemes to their full advantage for grey partridges, there are many who are not. Either economic

considerations or the perceived ease of operations have influenced option selection. To give grey partridges the priority they deserve, when your AES agreement is up for renewal, make grey partridges your main concern. Based on this (and other) work we recommend that you include **wild bird cover** (both brood-rearing and winter cover varieties), **conservation headlands** and **beetle banks** in your new agreement (if you don't have them already).

We strongly recommend that you take time to read our series of fact sheets on restoring grey partridges, to understand

what options are needed at the different stages in a grey partridge's life ([www.gwct.org.uk/factsheets](http://www.gwct.org.uk/factsheets)). For one-to-one help and advice please book a visit from a member of our advisory team.



Conservation headlands are ideal for partridges.

**Table 2**

How we grouped the AES options used by PCS members. We considered only options that were likely to be of major benefit to grey partridges, based on GWCT research and the experience of our Advisors. The list of examples is not complete, but is merely a summary of the options in each group.

| <b>Table 2</b>               |   |
|------------------------------|---|
| <b>Group</b>                 | <b>Examples (not complete)</b>  |
| Arable flora management      | Cultivated plot or margin for arable flora  |
| Beetle banks                 | Beetle banks  |
| Conservation headlands       | Conservation headlands: normal, fertiliser-free or unharvested  |
| Crop management              | Supplement for small fields; Reduced herbicide cereal crop  |
| Field corner management      | Take field corners out of management: arable land, SDA land or outside SDA & ML   |
| Grass strips                 | Buffer strips on cultivated land, intensive grassland or arable land  |
| Grassland & scrub management | Enclosed rough grazing: SDA land & ML parcels under 15ha; Maintenance/restoration of successional areas and scrub; Maintenance/restoration of rough grazing for birds |
| Spring cropping              | Undersown spring cereals  |
| Wild bird cover              | Wild bird seed mixture; 6m uncropped, cultivated margins on arable land   |
| Winter cropping              | Over-wintered stubbles; Cereals for whole crop silage followed by over-wintered stubbles; <i>Brassica</i> fodder crops followed by over-wintered stubbles             |

**Table 3**

AES options that resulted in higher or lower grey partridge demographics. Bold - options consistently associated with higher values; Italics - those consistently associated with lower values. The other options were winners at some life cycle stages and losers at others. Their use requires careful consideration to provide the best outcome for grey partridges.

| <b>Table 3</b> |                                      |                                     |                                     |                                     |
|----------------|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
|                | <b>Change in spring pair density</b> | <b>Grey partridge production</b>    |                                     | <b>Over-winter change</b>           |
|                |                                      | <b>Young-to-old</b>                 | <b>Mean brood size</b>              |                                     |
| <b>Winners</b> | <b>Conservation headlands</b>        | <b>Beetle banks</b>                 | Field corner management             | <b>Conservation headlands</b>       |
|                | Crop management                      | Spring cropping management          | <b>Wild bird cover</b>              | <b>Beetle banks</b>                 |
|                | Grass strips                         |                                     |                                     | Field corner management             |
|                | Winter cropping management           | <b>Wild bird cover</b>              |                                     | Grass strips                        |
|                |                                      |                                     |                                     | <b>Wild bird cover</b>              |
|                |                                      |                                     |                                     | Winter cropping management          |
| <b>Losers</b>  | Field corner management              | Grass strips                        | Crop management                     | <i>Grass &amp; scrub management</i> |
|                | <i>Grass &amp; scrub management</i>  | <i>Grass &amp; scrub management</i> | Grass strips                        | Spring cropping management          |
|                | Spring cropping management           | Winter cropping management          | <i>Grass &amp; scrub management</i> |                                     |



## Regional round-up

*The Yorkshire group focused on how management for partridges benefits a broad range of other farmland birds.*

The South-West was the first group to meet in the south of England at James Mawle's farm near Okehampton. The theme was predator control and Mike Swan, advisor for the south of England, gave a practical demonstration on how and when to legally control predators on land that is attempting to encourage greys.

The next three meetings for the Central England, East Anglia and South-East groups were lucky to have Francis Buner, our grey partridge ecologist, discussing how to re-establish the grey partridge as a breeding species on land where their numbers have fallen. Peter Thompson emphasised the importance of already having plenty of good, year-round habitat in place for partridges **before** thinking about releasing. There will be many reasons why the population has declined in the past and these need to be corrected for the released birds. Francis also spoke about the dos and don'ts of releasing, emphasising throughout that this is not a short-term fix, but will take a minimum of five years to properly re-establish a sustainable population.

The Wessex group met at Sir James Scott's Rotherfield Park Estate, to look at the different habitats that grey partridges require. Good nesting grass margins, beetle banks with both brood-rearing and winter cover planted alongside them, conservation headlands, blocks of winter cover and feeding were seen and predator control was also discussed. It is pleasing to be able to demonstrate all of these habitats located in one small area – an example that many more should be following.

The Cotswold group met at Ian Boyd's farm at Whittington Lodge Farm, Whittington. The event was held jointly with Gloucestershire FWAG and Natural England and sold out! The theme was farmland birds in general, but concentrating on the grey partridge as a key species. The

farm has a good number of other farmland bird species including corn buntings. This was a very successful day and was a clear example of organisations working together to help farmers produce the necessary habitats for birds. It was good to see that the attendances for the southern meetings were high, showing the continuing interest in the grey partridge.

The Norfolk group met at Hilborough Estate by kind permission of Hugh Van Cutsem. Francis Buner and headkeeper, Gerald Gray, demonstrated the techniques involved in successful fostering. Gerald produces eggs from a few captive pairs, originating from picked up nests, then incubates and rears under bantams until the partridges are fostered to barren pairs. Chicks reared in small groups in this way have an advantage over birds from a large batch from a rearing unit, which are inclined to get back together in a large group when fostered, unless selected from different batches on the rearing field.

In the north, the Cumbria and North Lancashire group met at farmer and Natural England advisor, John Bowman's farm. John Holland led the walk which looked at the various habitat types required for grey partridge conservation, but focused on brood-rearing cover as a key requirement for increasing wild productivity. John demonstrated sweep netting to look at the insects present in different habitat types. The odd sawfly was found which was encouraging, but overall insects were disappointingly rare. The pollen and nectar mixes we saw on an adjacent farm were struggling with the weed burden, highlighting how important it is to prepare a good seedbed, preferably with a fallow period to reduce weeds.

Almost 50 people attended the Yorkshire group's summer meeting at Skipwith near York, where host, Charlie Forbes Adam, has dedicated an area of about 500 acres

to grey partridge conservation. Run in conjunction with Natural England, the meeting focused on how management for grey partridges can benefit a broad range of other threatened farmland bird species such as corn bunting, linnet, yellowhammer and tree sparrow which are target species for the Yorkshire area. Hugo Straker led the farm walk, with Jonathan Payne and Rachel Webster of Natural England providing input on how the agri-environment schemes can be used to provide the necessary habitat requirements. The next day Hugo ran the Durham & Northern Dales group meeting which was kindly hosted by John Boon near Beamish. The farm incorporates a family farm shoot and the day looked at how activities undertaken to support the pheasant shoot can be maximised to conserve grey partridges.

We would like to thank Carter Jonas, CastleAcre Insurance, Complete Land Management, Gray's Chartered Surveyors, Ruffer LLP, Savills and Strutt & Parker for kindly sponsoring our grey partridge groups.



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

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