



# Hoppers

## The importance of providing hoppers for gamebirds

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 renest 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 (see pictures overleaf to show you what to do). Metal drums are essential in most circumstances to avoid hopper destruction by rats or grey squirrels. These days second hand ones 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.

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### The Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust

For over 75 years our scientists have been researching why species like the grey partridge, water vole, corn bunting and black grouse have declined. We are continually developing practical measures to reverse these declines.

Our aim is simple - a thriving countryside rich in game and other wildlife.

We are an independent charity reliant on voluntary donations and the support of people who care about the survival of our natural heritage.

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



### Contact

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# Construction - Step by step



**Step 1.** Cut the top out of 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. Drums with clip on lids are also available and this obviates the need for this step.



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

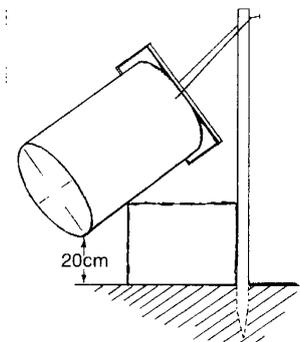
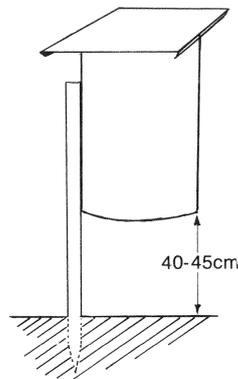


**Step 3.** Paint a neutral 'country' colour so that it blends into its landscape. Ours are all dark green for uniformity and tidiness.



**Step 4.** (Left and below) Nail to a post, fill with wheat and clip the lid on. The base should be about knee high (40-45cm from the ground) for pheasants (30cm

for poult) and two-thirds this height for partridges. Or lean the feeder against a bale of straw for partridges (see below).



(Below) 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.



## More information

The Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust's Advisory Service can provide further advice on feeding systems for gamebirds, and on all aspects of game management. For information, please contact 01425 651013.

