

Grey Partridge

Perdix perdix



Description

This familiar bird of open country – including farmland – has an orange brown face, grey breast and belly, all closely and finely barred, chestnut bars on the flanks and a curved horseshoe-shaped mark on the upper belly.

Grey Partridges nest on the ground in hedge bottoms, grass margins, game cover and nettle beds. Dead, tussocky grass left over from the previous year is particularly attractive as nesting cover. Adult Grey Partridge feed on seeds and shoots throughout the year on areas such as rotational set-aside, winter stubble, weeds and crop margins. The chicks need a diet of insects, especially caterpillars, bugs, ants and aphids, taken mainly from crop margins and weed areas.

The current UK population has dropped dramatically to less than 150,000 pairs due to loss of habitat for nesting and feeding – this being caused by modern farming practices.

National Status

The UK population of Grey Partridge declined by over 50% between 1969 and 1990. Populations in some mixed farming areas seem stable, but in other areas declines have sometimes exceeded 95%.

Local Status

The breeding population of this species in Barnsley may exceed 100 pairs and a comprehensive survey would reveal the true status of this species in the borough.

Casual observations suggest that there may have been a slight increase in the eastern parts of the borough due to 'greening' of former industrial areas.

Legal Status

The Grey Partridge is protected in Britain under the Game Acts. It is also listed on Annex III/I of the EC Birds Directive and Appendix III of the Bern Convention.

Links with other Action Plans

- HAP5 Hedgerows
- HAP6 Arable Field Margins
- HAP9 Lowland Dry Acidic Grassland
- HAP17 Open Mosaic Habitats on Previously Developed Land

Current Factors Causing Loss or Decline

- Loss of nest sites (such as hedge bottoms) to farm intensification.
- Reduced food supplies and sources for chick food through the use of pesticides and herbicides, as well as the loss of winter stubble feeding grounds for overwintering birds.
- Vulnerability of nests to predators in farmland with poor cover.
- Nest destruction caused by early mowing and other farm operations.

Current Local Action

- The Game Conservancy Trust (GCT) encourages land managers to create suitable conditions for Grey Partridge, including suitable nest sites and cover, summer and winter feeding areas (eg. conservation headlands and winter stubbles), and control of predators and shooting.
- A Species Action Plan has been prepared for this species by the RSPB, FWAG and the GCT.
- DEFRA will continue to encourage the management of 'Environmental Stewardship Land' sensitively for this species.
- An estimation survey of the borough's population was completed in 2002/2003 by volunteers and published by Barnsley Biodiversity Trust in 2008, entitled, *Birds of Conservation Concern*.

Proposed Local Action

- Assess current coverage of DEFRA Stewardship Schemes that support Grey Partridge options (with Natural England).
- Encourage landowners to take up a Stewardship Scheme to benefit Grey Partridge (Natural England lead).
- Extract information from the *Barnsley Bird Study Group Breeding Bird Survey* to provide populations and mapping of breeding Grey Partridge.

BMBC Planning Policy Actions

- Include habitat and species protection policies in development plans and/or supplementary guidance.

BMBC Land Ownership and Management Actions

- Produce 'best practice' guidelines to promote positive management practices on Local Authority owned land.
- Review management of public green space to provide suitable grass margin habitat for Grey Partridge.
- Promote habitat linkages between Local Authority owned land and suitable habitat in agricultural land (eg. land under stewardship).