

Information Note: Land Management for Black Grouse



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Action Points

Black Grouse were once widespread in the UK but are now declining. They require a mosaic of moorland, grassland and woodland.

- Ensure a mosaic of heather heights is available to provide nest sites, feeding and cover.
- Manage grazing on white hill to create a sward with some areas more than 30cm high.
- Retain existing boggy areas and enhance them by ditch blocking.
- Look for opportunities to create and expand native woodland.
- Avoid disturbing or damaging lek sites.
- Retain upland meadows that are rich in wild flowers.
- Retain or add arable areas in the uplands and retain arable stubbles over winter.



Habitat requirements

Black Grouse generally require

- a mosaic of moorland, grassland, mire and woodland.
- a place to display known as a lek site. This typically has short vegetation and good all round visibility.
- a variety of different food. Heather and blaeberry are eaten throughout the year by adult birds with heather being particularly important in winter. In spring, black grouse will feed heavily on larch and bog cotton buds to get into good breeding condition. In summer a range of herbs are taken from moorland flushes, herb rich rough grazing, and meadows. Seed heads of rushes, grasses and sedges are also eaten in autumn as well as a range of berries such as Blaeberry, Cowberry, and Crowberry. In winter, particularly if snow cover is prolonged, Black Grouse feed in trees eating the buds and catkins of Birch, Alder and Willow, and berries from Rowan, Hawthorn and Juniper.

Status of Black Grouse in the UK:

Black Grouse were once widespread in the UK.

In Scotland they are now one of our fastest declining bird species. Black Grouse are currently a red listed species of high conservation concern.

Black Grouse generally inhabit the altitudinal range of 200-550m. The Scottish stronghold for black grouse is in the central and eastern Highlands in particular Perthshire, however, they are widely distributed in suitable habitats across the Scottish uplands.



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Management Requirements to Benefit Black Grouse

Grazing

- Manage rough grazing on hill ground to create a sward with some areas of over 30cm in height to provide a mosaic of open and dense vegetation.
- Avoid letting vegetation become uniformly tall and dense as this can impede chick movement.
- Allow plants to flower and seed.
- Retain upland meadows rich in wild flowers.

Woodland

- Create and expand native woodland in open landscapes. Plant small woods of 1 to 5ha of birch, willow, hawthorn, rowan, alder and Scots Pine to provide an additional source of food.
- Design woodlands with uneven edges to maximise the edge preferred by Black Grouse.
- Larger woodlands may be used for breeding if the planting density is low enough to maintain vegetation suitable for chick rearing and adult feeding, in particular heather and blaeberry. A high percentage (ideally over 40%) of open ground will be needed to keep woodland suitable for brood rearing once it is mature. Maximise the woodland edge available through your woodland design and encourage scrub along it.

Moorland

- Retain some areas of longer heather to provide nest sites.
- Create a mosaic of heather ages and structure

Wetlands

- Retain existing boggy areas and flushes, these are a rich source of invertebrates for chick rearing.
- Enhance areas of wet heath and upland bog by blocking drains and ditches

Lek sites

- Avoid disturbing lek sites, particularly from mid March to end of May.
- Keep lek site vegetation short.
- Avoid planting trees within 100m of lek sites to maintain good all round visibility.
- Avoid erecting fences near lek sites.

Arable crops

- Retain arable stubbles over winter.
- Plant arable crops such as turnips with patches of weeds in the uplands. These will have wider biodiversity benefits (e.g. farmland birds) as well as being attractive to black grouse.

Lek sites

Lek sites offer a n opportunity to monitor and assess Black Grouse populations in the spring.

Radio tracking studies show that cocks are faithful to an area of between 250 to 700ha around the lek site they attend, so management is best targeted in the suitable habitat of up to 700ha around the lek.

Key messages:

Black Grouse are a fast declining species however as a land manager there are positive management actions you can take to encourage and support Black Grouse on the hill and have a positive biodiversity effect.

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