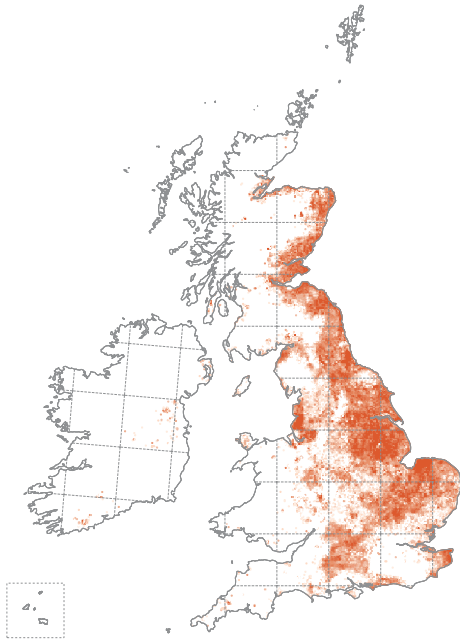




giving nature a home

LAND MANAGEMENT FOR WILDLIFE

GREY PARTRIDGE (*Perdix perdix*)



Breeding abundance map reproduced from Balmer et al 2013 Bird Atlas with permission from British Trust for Ornithology.



Chris Gomersall (rspb-images.com)

The grey partridge has a brick-red face, as opposed to the black-and-white face pattern on the red-legged partridge. They can be found in most farming systems, except those with predominantly improved grasslands. The UK grey partridge population fell by 92% between 1970 and 2013, and this has been caused by changes in farming that have led to the loss of insect food, seed sources, winter cover and nesting habitat. Changes in grassland management have also impacted on the species. Marginalisation of suitable habitat has also increased the impact of predation.

WHAT DO GREY PARTRIDGE NEED?

Nesting habitat

Grey partridge nest on the ground in hedge bottoms, grass margins, beetle banks, cereals, game cover and nettle beds. Dead tussocky grass left over from the previous year is particularly attractive as nesting cover.

Summer food

Grey partridge chicks feed on insects, especially caterpillars, beetles, bugs, ants and aphids. Breeding is more successful when there is plenty of this food

available. Chicks take insects mainly from within the crop, especially the headlands.

Winter food and cover

Adult grey partridge feed mainly on seeds and shoots throughout the year. Places where they can find such food include weedy winter stubbles, beetle banks and wild bird cover crops. They also require cover to conceal them from predators, especially in early spring.

ANNUAL LIFECYCLE

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Coveys break up into breeding pairs	█	█	█	█								
Pairs nest, producing a single brood of up to 20 young				█	█	█	█	█				
Coveys from post breeding								█	█	█	█	█

HOW CAN I ENCOURAGE GREY PARTRIDGE?

Nesting habitat

- Avoid planting trees and do not increase the height of hedgerows above 2 metres in areas used by nesting partridge.
- Create tussocky grass buffer strips and field corners around arable fields, especially fields with open boundaries, ditches or short hedges. Avoid cutting all margins in the same year.
- Create beetle banks through the middle of arable fields larger than 16 hectares.
- In pastoral areas where grey partridge are still present, leave 6 m buffer strips of silage fields uncut and maintain or increase areas of arable cropping.

Summer food

- Create brood-rearing habitat with plenty of insect food adjacent to good nesting habitat.
- An annual mixture of cereal and at least two other crops can be established (minimum 6 metres wide) as a brood-rearing cover.
- Undersown spring cereals can boost insect numbers on mixed farms.
- Where it is appropriate to the soil conditions and type establish fertiliser free conservation headlands or low-input cereal crops to boost beneficial broad-leaved weeds and associated insects.
- Delay using broad spectrum pesticides as

late as possible.

- Maintain areas of unimproved grassland or manage grassland with low-inputs to boost insect food.

Winter food

- Keep some tall cover (>20 cm) at all times, especially in February and March, close to or as part of suitable feeding areas, to reduce predation.
- Create areas of wild bird seed mixture in the spring with a high proportion of cereal in the mix. Kale is an important component for grey partridge, as it provides cover in the first year and seed in the second year.
- Renew half the crops each year, to provide some cover in early spring every year.
- Leave fields of overwintered stubbles unmanaged for as long as possible through the winter and early spring. Where the stubbles lack green cover, spinning mustard can create areas of green cover.
- Low-input cereal crops followed by overwintered stubble provide more seed food for birds than conventional stubbles.
- In pastoral areas where grey partridge are still present, and where appropriate soil conditions are present, maintain or increase areas of arable cropping.

KEY POINTS

- **Ensure that the farm provides safe cover throughout the year**
- **Create brood-rearing habitat with plenty of insect food adjacent to good nesting areas**
- **Provide seed food through the winter with wild bird seed mixtures and overwintered stubble**
- **In some areas predator control may be required to helping grey partridge populations**

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