



Black Grouse © northeastwildlife.co.uk



Black Grouse (*Tetrao tetrix*) Species Action Plan

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Latest version	February 2010

Conservation Status

UK Birds of Conservation Concern - Red Conservation Status
 UK Biodiversity Action Plan Species
 North East Biodiversity Action Plan Species
 Games Act, closed season 11th December to 19th August

Description

Male black grouse or 'blackcocks' have glossy blue-black plumage with bright red patches over each eye called wattles and striking white stripes on each wing which can be seen when they are in flight. They have curved black tail feathers which they fan when displaying to reveal white under tail feathers.

The females or 'greyhens' have mottled brown feathers to camouflage them in heather and grass when nesting or feeding on the ground. They have a short, slightly forked tail and their white wing bars are narrower than on males. The female is slightly smaller than the male. Black grouse can live up to five years in the wild.

Adult black grouse have wide food requirements feeding on heather, herbs and grasses and the buds and berries from trees. Young chicks feed on insects. Black grouse therefore rely on a mosaic of habitats on moorland edges, where heather meets grassy fields and areas of scrub and woodland to provide sources of food all year round.

Studies on the dispersal patterns of black grouse show that juvenile females disperse on average 9 kilometres from their natal site compared with less than 1 kilometre by males. The male black grouse carry out early morning displays at clearings known as 'leks' to defend their territories and during spring compete for the attention of females to mate. The display involves strutting with their tails spread and heads held low whilst making their distinctive call.

Once mating is over the male takes no further part. The female makes a nest site on the ground in tall, reasonably dense, vegetation where she will lay 6 to 13 eggs which will hatch in mid to late June. Chicks leave the nest immediately, following the hen to feed in insect rich vegetation and become independent after 2 to 3 months. Cock poultts will leave the family group first in early September, followed by the females in October and November.

Current Extent in Northumberland

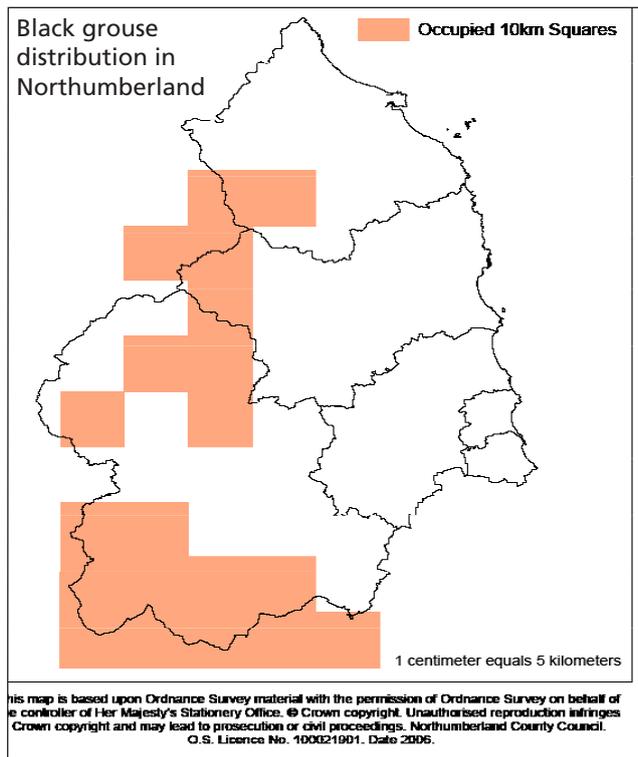
Measures to arrest the decline of black grouse in England are being coordinated by the North Pennines Black Grouse Recovery Project. The project covers the three main areas that contain black grouse in England which are the North Pennines AONB, the Yorkshire Dales and north-west Northumberland.

The county of Northumberland is included in two of these areas; the North Pennines AONB and north-west Northumberland.

The population of lekking males in the North Pennines AONB was recorded as 773 males in 1998 and has increased to 1029 males in 2006. The overall population covers a range of 93 occupied 5 kilometre grid squares, an increase of 19 grid squares since 1998.

The population of lekking males in north-west Northumberland was recorded as 61 males in 1998 and has declined to 50 males in 2006. The overall population covers a range of 12 occupied 5 kilometre grid squares, which has remained the same since 1998. The population in this area is isolated from the core North Pennines population and specific conservation measures will be required in order to arrest this decline.

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Current Factors Causing Loss or Decline

- Changes in farming
- Predation
- Poor weather conditions
- Fence collisions

Associated Action Plans

Blanket Bog
 Heather Moorland
 Native Woodland
 Upland Hay Meadows

Further Information

This black grouse action plan links to the black grouse UK BAP action plan whose lead partners are the Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds.

Black Grouse UK website -
<http://www.blackgrouse.info/index.htm>

The Population Status of Birds in the UK - Birds of Conservation Concern: 2002-2007, RSPB

Targets

Increase the population of black grouse in England to 1,000 lekking males by 2010

Increase the range of the black grouse in England to 48 occupied 10 kilometre grid squares by 2010.

Code	Priority Actions	Date
BG A01	Ensure funding to continue the North Pennines Black Grouse Recovery Project	ongoing
BG A02	Continue to carry out brood counts on an annual basis to monitor breeding success	ongoing
BG A03	Continue to carry out lek counts every 4 years to monitor adult numbers	2010
BG A04	Provide free advisory visits to farmers and land owners to encourage them to improve conditions for black grouse	ongoing
BG A05	Ensure funding is available through agri-environment schemes and forestry grants to deliver landscape scale habitat improvements for black grouse	ongoing
BG A06	Continue to promote the code of conduct for bird watchers when observing black grouse	ongoing
BG A07	Promote and support efforts to secure and expand the range of black grouse in Northumberland	2010