



The Case Against Shooting





Game bird farm

FEATHERED TARGETS

Most people believe that game bird shooting involves wild birds being shot for the pot. In fact, the vast majority of the millions of birds shot every year in Britain are pheasants and virtually all of them are purpose-bred. And the main reason they are bred is not for eating but so that they can be shot for sport.

units hold one male and up to ten female pheasants. Partridges are kept in smaller cages in breeding pairs. Our undercover evidence revealed that the caged birds suffer from stress, as well as feather loss, and back and head wounds from stress-induced aggression. Many of the pheasants lunge repeatedly at their cage roofs in a forlorn attempt to escape. Rather than trying to reduce the birds' stress, gamekeepers instead fit restraining devices

GAME BIRD BREEDING

Animal Aid has visited huge game farms in the UK, which confine game birds who are used for egg-producing ('breeding stock') in metal battery cages. Tens of thousands of pheasants and partridges face spending the whole of their productive lives (around two years) in these miserable, stress-inducing cages, despite huge public support for a ban on any cages used to confine animals. A June 2018 YouGov poll revealed that 80% of people oppose the use of cages to confine breeding birds (only 11% disagreed).ⁱ The pheasant breeding



Chicks are reared in industrial sheds



The ones who survive are also often fitted with 'bits' over their beaks in order to limit the aggression between birds caused by the crowded and oppressive rearing sheds.

RELEASED TO BE SHOT

As the partridge and pheasant shooting seasons approach (1 September to 1 February for partridges

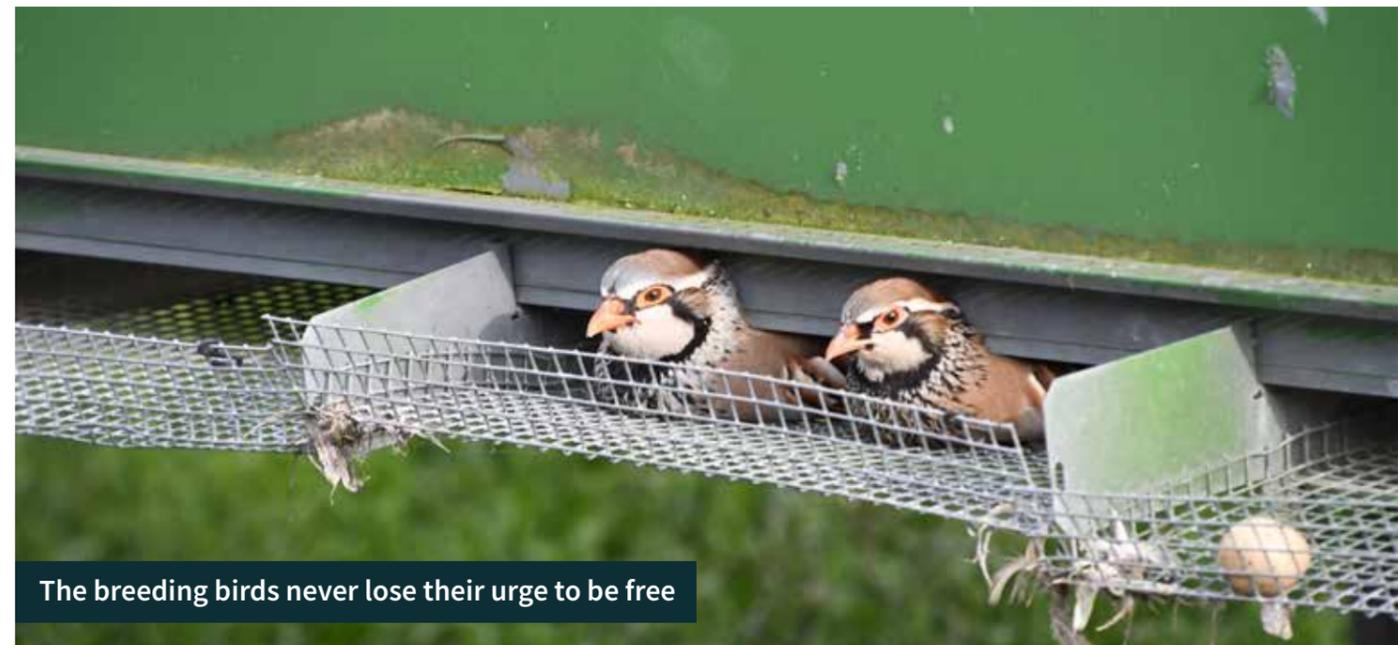
(bits) over the birds' beaks to limit the damage that the birds can do to one another – but it does nothing to make the birds less unhappy. Our undercover investigators have recorded temperatures inside the cages as high as 41°C in summer and -4°C in winter.

and 1 October to 1 February for pheasants), the birds are encouraged into fields of cover crops and, come shooting days, are scared ('beaten') into the sky to serve as feathered targets.

The birds' offspring are reared in industrial hatcheries, sheds and, finally, large 'release pens'. In the hatcheries, the newly born chicks are tossed onto conveyor belts, boxed up and sent off to other game farms. Birds who have not hatched in time, or who fail to make the grade, will be thrown (sometimes live) into a macerator – a high-speed grinder.

DEATH RATE

One third of the birds released for shooting are gunned down. Having been conditioned to be dependent from birth on their keepers for housing and food, released game birds are especially vulnerable to exposure, starvation, disease and predation and to being killed on the roads.



The breeding birds never lose their urge to be free

MORTALITY AND WASTE

Around 50 million birds are bred for shooting each year (the vast majority are pheasants), of whom around one in three are shot, but only a



fraction (about 3 million) go into the food chain.^{ii, iii, iv}

Economic studies show that it costs more than £30 to produce each bird shot, but that the cost of each carcass is around £4 retail - evidence that the birds are bred for 'sport', not food.^v

Some high-end shoots offer the opportunity to kill up to 2,000 birds over two days for £50,000^{vi}. It has come to light that almost half of shoots give away shot birds free to game dealers and 12% pay the game dealer to collect them.^{vii} There have also been discoveries of dead birds being dumped or buried in pits, because of insufficient demand for their flesh.^{viii, ix}

This also shows that shooting birds for 'sport' is fundamentally about 'manufacturing' a feathered target rather than about food production.

SLAUGHTER OF INDIGENOUS WILDLIFE

Large numbers of pheasants and partridges inevitably attract – and probably boost the populations of – predator species such as



Predator animals are trapped and killed

stoats, weasels, foxes and members of the crow family. Gamekeepers label them as 'vermin' and deliberately kill them with guns, traps and snares. Species ranging from badgers to cats and dogs – and even protected birds of prey – are also caught and killed. Millions of animals are slaughtered every year in these 'predator control' programmes. Because some other species which do not threaten game bird production, such as ground-nesting birds, are not persecuted (and, in fact, flourish because their natural predators are killed), the industry promotes its slaughter of wildlife as a vital conservation effort.

ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

The Oxford Lead Symposium states that shooters discharge between 2,500 and 6,700 tonnes of shot at birds every year. It is ingested by other animals and causes sickness and death. It is spread further than where it lands by animals' movement – even into waterways. The Lead Ammunition Group estimates that between 50,000 and 100,000 wildfowl are killed in Britain each year because they accidentally ingest spent gunshot.^x

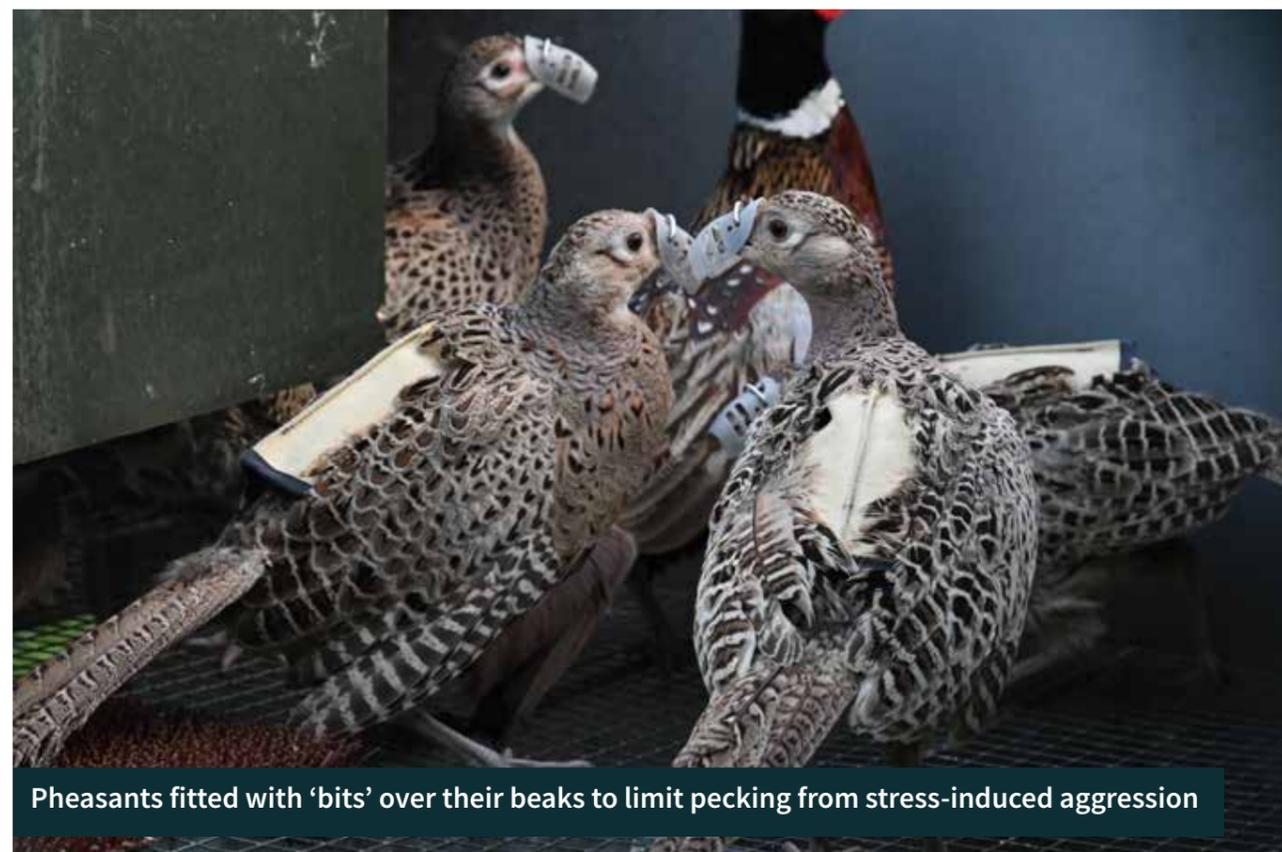
Additionally, there is a massive annual challenge to wildlife by the release, within the space of a few weeks, of millions of pheasants and partridges. Native wildlife must compete with this massive avian influx for food and habitat. Following a legal challenge from Wild Justice, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) announced in September 2019 that it would conduct a review of the way game birds are released on or near protected areas.^{xi}

ECONOMICS

The alleged economic benefits are based on

DUCK PRODUCTION AND SHOOTING

Every year in Britain around a million ducks are shot for sport between 1 September and 31 January.^{xiv} Most will have been purpose-bred in sheds and delivered to flight pond locations by breeder businesses. The flight pond is an open expanse of water used by the mallards in the evening for roosting. The ducks will return to the pond at dusk from other daytime feeding areas and depart from the pond at dawn. These are the times that the shooters lie in wait.



Pheasants fitted with 'bits' over their beaks to limit pecking from stress-induced aggression

incomplete data and are exaggerated. A 2014 report by Public and Corporate Economic Consultants (PACEC), which was commissioned by a number of pro-shooting organisations, claimed that shooting is worth £2 billion to the UK economy. ^{xii}

Economic experts from Sheffield University and Cormack Economics, commissioned by the League Against Cruel Sports, scrutinised these claims and reanalysed the data according to 'standard Treasury Green Book Guidance'. They concluded that shooting is valued at between £267 million and £746 million. The Sheffield economists state that the PACEC reports had many shortcomings, such as failing to follow Office for National Statistics Guidelines, combining data on shooting live 'quarry' and clay shooting and failing to discuss subsidies given to the shooting sector. ^{xiii}

Conclusion

This report sets out the case against game bird shooting, by highlighting the negative impact that this 'sport' has on the environment, on indigenous wildlife and, of course, on the millions of birds who are bred to be used as feathered targets. Animal Aid reiterates its call for a ban on the production of birds for sport shooting – and as an immediate measure, campaigns for a ban on the cruel battery cages used to imprison game birds used for breeding.

References

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- ⁱⁱ <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/sep/12/defra-review-release-game-birds-legal-threat>
- ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/chris-packham-starts-legal-challenge-over-release-of-35m-pheasants-and-partridges-k2dvshxp>
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- ^v <https://pdf.euro.savills.co.uk/uk/rural---other/shoot-benchmarking-survey-2017-2018-season.pdf>
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- ^x <http://www.leadammunitiongroup.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/Executive-Summary-to-LAG-Update-Report.pdf>
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- ^{xiv} https://www.researchgate.net/publication/311231430_Duck_hunting_bag_estimates_for_the_201314_season_in_France
- ^{xv} <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/labour-review-grouse-shooting-environment-damage-shootings-animal-rights-a9052321.html>

GROUSE SHOOTING

Grouse shooting takes place on managed moorland between August 12 (the 'Glorious 12th') and December 10. Around 700,000 are shot down annually by 'guns' who are typically charged £150 for each brace (pair) of birds killed and retrieved. ^{xv}

The moors are highly managed, creating the unnatural heather-rich landscape. To create fresh young shoots of heather for the grouse to eat, the heather is burned – a practice that can damage the environment by releasing carbon locked into the peat bogs underpinning the moors. The Committee on Climate Change says that damage to UK peat soils is causing a staggering 18.5 million tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent (CO₂e) to be released to the atmosphere every year – which is more than all the oil refineries in the UK emit annually. The last report estimated that the vast majority of it is down to burning on grouse moors.



A technique used in the past to encourage new heather growth was drainage ditches – another source of damage to the peat bogs. Draining dries out the bogs and, like burning, causes carbon to be released. Draining can also trigger flooding of low-lying areas and cause discolouration of reservoir drinking water.

The harsh 'management' of moorlands results in grouse numbers booming. But as they overburden the landscape, they become weakened and fall prey to a lethal parasite –

Strongylosis. This attacks the gut and leads to a collapse in the population. A cycle of population boom and bust is the norm on Britain's grouse moors.

Finally, grouse moor operators engage in the 'control' or 'management' of large numbers of native birds and mammals who interfere with grouse shooting. They are trapped, shot, snared and (illegally) poisoned. Victims include stoats, weasels and even iconic raptors such as buzzards and golden eagles.



A snare



They find it so stressful, they often attack one another



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