



C H Gomersall | RSPB Images

## Thank you

We hope Britain's birdwatchers will support this code. We are all working to ensure that black grouse and capercaillies continue to inspire wonder. So we must present a responsible image to others, particularly those on whose support their future may rest. Please help this effort by being responsible and sensible when looking for these birds. You can also help by providing the details of any lek counts (with map references) to the relevant county bird recorder – to find your local recorder, check [www.britishbirds.co.uk](http://www.britishbirds.co.uk)

Further copies of this code are available from the RSPB UK Headquarters. For more information about black grouse and capercaillies, visit [www.rspb.org.uk](http://www.rspb.org.uk)

## The RSPB

**UK Headquarters, The Lodge, Sandy, Bedfordshire SG19 2DL. Tel: 01767 680551.**

**Scotland Headquarters, Dunedin House, 25 Ravelston Terrace, Edinburgh EH4 3TP. Tel: 0131 311 6500.**

**South Wales Office, Sutherland House, Castlebridge, Cowbridge Road East, Cardiff CF11 9AB. Tel: 029 2035 3000.**

This code has been produced in partnership with:



and the Black Grouse and Capercaillie Biodiversity Action Plan steering groups, which comprise:

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| British Association for Shooting and Conservation | National Gamekeepers' Association       |
| Centre for Ecology and Hydrology                  | National Trust                          |
| Country Land and Business Association             | NFU Cymru                               |
| Countryside Council for Wales                     | Northumberland National Park Authority  |
| Deer Commission for Scotland                      | Northumbrian Water                      |
| Defra   | Royal Zoological Society of Scotland    |
| English Nature                                    | The RSPB                                |
| Farmers Union of Wales                            | Scottish Executive                      |
| Forest Enterprise                                 | Scottish Gamekeepers' Association       |
| Forestry Commission                               | Scottish Landowners' Federation         |
| Forestry and Timber Association                   | Scottish Natural Heritage               |
| Game Conservancy Trust                            | Severn Trent Water                      |
| Heather Trust                                     | Tilhill Forestry                        |
| Ministry of Defence                               | The Wildlife Trusts                     |
| Moorland Association                              | Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority |
| National Assembly for Wales                       |   |
| National Farmers' Union of Scotland               |   |

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**SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE**

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# Black grouse and capercaillie

A birdwatchers' code of conduct



for birds • for people • for ever

The black grouse and capercaillie are in serious trouble. Numbers are now so low in Britain that they are at risk of extinction in many areas: the capercaillie could be lost from Britain within the next two decades. These birds need all the help they can get, so as birdwatchers, it is vital that we take our responsibilities seriously and avoid harming these wonderful but scarce birds.

Conservation groups and leading birdwatching magazines have drawn up this code of conduct. We want everyone to enjoy the countryside and its bird life and hope that everyone who wishes to see black grouse and capercaillies will observe this code. Patience and respecting the needs of the birds will often be rewarded with good views.

Please follow these guidelines in addition to the Birdwatchers' Code of Conduct, and always ensure that you have the landowner's permission before entering private land.

## Disappearing grouse

Population declines are being tackled by:

- encouraging appropriate grazing by sheep and deer
- increasing habitat quality
- removing or marking deer fences
- discouraging fox snares, which are known to kill capercaillies
- reducing rates of predation

Many conservation organisations and landowners are working hard to help these birds, through the UK Biodiversity Action Plan. Shooting capercaillies is now illegal and there is a voluntary moratorium on shooting black grouse. However, the declines continue in many areas and black grouse and capercaillies need all the help we can give them. You can help too, when watching or photographing them.

Black grouse and capercaillies 'lek' at traditional sites as part of their mating ritual, generally in the spring. The lek is essential to the birds' breeding success, but they are easily disturbed here. If this happens in the key period of April to early May, the birds may not mate at all. They can also be vulnerable when nesting, rearing young and during severe winter weather.

## Watching capercaillies

- The capercaillie is listed on Schedule 1 of the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981. This makes it illegal to intentionally disturb birds when nesting.
- The RSPB provides opportunities to watch capercaillies lekking from its Osprey Centre at RSPB Abernethy Forest nature reserve, Strathspey, during April and May. Telephone 01479 821409 for details. Away from here, capercaillie leks should not be visited at all during the crucial April–May period.
- Capercaillies can be easier to see in autumn (from September), as there are usually more birds once juveniles have fledged.
- Capercaillies are less disturbed by vehicles than by walkers; if you have vehicular access to a forest, remain inside the vehicle with the engine switched off and observe birds quietly until they have moved back into the forest.
- Use well-defined tracks and paths, to which birds will often come in search of grit. Do not wander in heather and blaeberry/bilberry, especially between May and August when nesting hens and young birds may be present. Flushing them can split up broods, exposing them to predators, or cause birds to fly into fences. Every year, deer fences kill an estimated quarter of juvenile capercaillies.
- For the best chance of seeing capercaillies, book with a reputable Scottish wildlife tour company, which may have special arrangements with private estates and experience of showing capercaillies to visitors.

P. Newman (RSPB Images)



## Watching black grouse

- Black grouse lek for much of the year, the key period being April and May.
- Watch leks and feeding birds from a vehicle. Black grouse pay little attention to stationary vehicles that are at least 100 metres away. Ensure that you do not block access or disturb nearby residents. Avoid approaching a lek on foot, which usually disturbs the birds.
- Arrive at leks before daybreak. A vehicle stopping once it is light can disturb the birds. Stay in your vehicle and watch quietly through binoculars and telescopes. Get the flask of coffee from the boot before your vigil! Don't start the engine until after lekking has wound down, usually about two hours after dawn. Alternatively, consider watching a lek in the evening.
- Keep to footpaths, especially between May and August, when there may be nesting females and young birds present.
- Keep dogs under control (on a lead) when close to black grouse habitat and do not bring dogs into the field when you are watching grouse.
- The RSPB and Forest Enterprise hope to organise opportunities to watch black grouse in Wales and Scotland in the near future.