



The trouble with Shooting

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ISBN: 978-1905327-22-5



Feathered targets

Most people, if they think at all about ‘game bird’ shooting, imagine wild birds being shot for the pot.

In fact, the vast majority of birds shot every year in Britain are pheasants and virtually all of them are purpose-bred in cages, sheds and pens. The main reason they are bred is not for eating but so that they can be shot for sport.

We can see this clearly when examining the basic economics of game bird production and shooting. Figures from the shooting industry itself show that it costs more than 13 times as much to rear pheasants and get them airborne than the shot birds will fetch retail.¹ This demonstrates that the activity is fundamentally about ‘manufacturing’ a feathered target rather than food production.

***Shooting Times* magazine recently reported² that 40 million pheasants are bred for British shooters every year. An additional seven million partridges are produced for the same purpose.**



Game bird breeding

Game bird production often involves the use of metal battery cages for egg-producing 'breeding stock'.

Hundreds of thousands of pheasants and partridges are incarcerated for the whole of their productive lives (around two years) in the kind of battery cages used for egg-laying hens.

Pheasants are confined in groups of around eight females and one male. Partridges are held in breeding pairs in metal boxes that are correspondingly smaller and just as bleak as the pheasant units. Covert filming undertaken by Animal Aid demonstrates that the birds suffer a high incidence of emaciation, feather-loss and back and head wounds. Many of the pheasants lunge repeatedly at their cage roofs in a forlorn attempt to escape. The resulting damage to their heads is known as 'scalping'.

Game bird producers also deploy industrial hatcheries, sheds, and finally, large 'release pens'. The birds, during the growing cycle, are routinely fitted with vision-limiting and restraint devices. The aggression between birds that the devices are intended to curb is caused by the crowded and oppressive conditions in which the birds are reared. The devices are typically attached to beaks or over eyes, and include so-called bits, spectacles, masks and clips. Some bits are attached with a pin that pierces the nasal septum. Other birds have the ends of their beaks amputated.





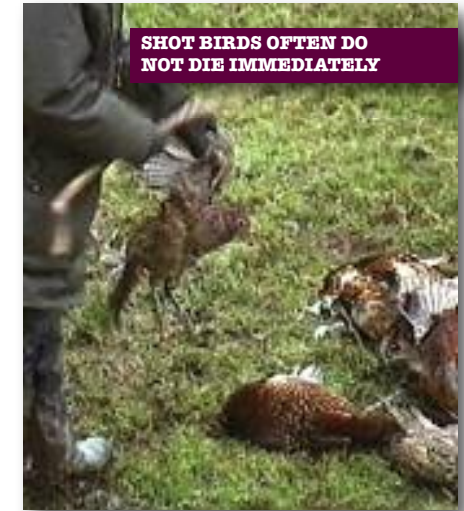
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Released to be shot

As partridge and pheasant shooting seasons approach

(they extend from 1 September to 1 February) ...

... the birds are encouraged into fields of specially-planted 'cover crops' and, come shooting days, are scared ('beaten') into the sky to serve as feathered targets.



SHOT BIRDS OFTEN DO NOT DIE IMMEDIATELY

Attrition rate

Because of the enfeeblement that results from being reared in captivity, it is estimated that around half of the birds die before they are gunned down.

They perish from exposure, starvation, disease and predation or under the wheels of motor vehicles. Having been conditioned to be dependent from birth on their keepers for housing and food, released game birds are especially vulnerable to such outcomes.

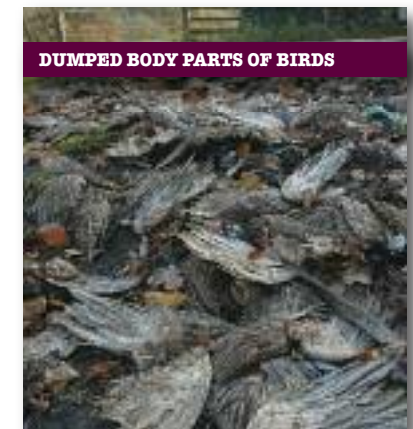


MANY BIRDS DIE FROM BEING STRUCK BY VEHICLES

Buried birds

A small group of shooters can kill up to 500 birds in a day. Many are not actually eaten.

There are several credible accounts of shot birds being dumped or buried in pits, because of insufficient demand for their flesh.^{3,4,5,6}



DUMPED BODY PARTS OF BIRDS

Other birds shot for 'sport'

Duck production and shooting

Every year in Britain nearly a million ducks are shot⁷ for sport between 1 September and 31 January.



DUCKLINGS ARE INTENSIVELY REARED IN SHEDS



AN EARLY VICTIM

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 the pond at dawn. These are the times when the shooters lay in wait.

Only one fifth of the shot ducks are sold to game dealers for public food consumption.⁸ The fate of the remaining 800,000 is uncertain. It is likely that the bred ducks suffer a similar rate (estimated to be 50 per cent) of predation, starvation, wounding and 'misadventure' as other game birds in the harsh environment of release, for which they are ill-prepared.

Grouse shooting

Grouse shooting takes place on managed moorland between 12 August (the 'Glorious 12th') and 10 December.

Around half a million birds are shot down annually by 'guns', who are typically charged £150 for each brace (pair) of birds killed and retrieved.

Writing about grouse moors in August 2007, the Deputy Editor of *Shooting Times* commented: 'While it may look wild, natural and free, it isn't. Our upland areas are amongst the most intensively managed landscapes around ...' He was referring to the creation of an unnatural, heather-rich environment in which the grouse thrive. To create fresh young shoots, the heather is burned – a practice that can damage the environment by releasing the carbon locked into the peat bogs underpinning the moors. 'Where burning occurs,' reports an expert, 'the hydrology changes and the peat is open to decomposition and erosion. This strips the moor of carbon as surely as setting fire to the Amazon Forest.'⁹

A technique used to encourage new heather growth and provide habitat for grouse is to dig drainage ditches. This is another source of damage to the peat



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bogs. It dries them out 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.

Grouse moor operators also 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 and weasels, and even iconic raptors such as buzzards and golden eagles.

Waste and mortality

While 47 million pheasants and partridges are released annually, industry figures show that 'only' 18 million of this total are shot and retrieved.¹⁰

Of the 18 million, industry data further reveal that fewer than eight million are sold to game dealers. It is claimed that the remaining 10 million are handed over to shooters or taken by shoot operators.¹¹

Slaughter of indigenous wildlife

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



NATIVE ANIMALS ARE LABELLED AS VERMIN AND KILLED

DEAD FOXES AND CROWS ON A GAMEKEEPER'S GIBBET



© K. MUTIMER

RESCUED PHEASANT
IN A SANCTUARY



Environmental issues

The shooting industry is guilty of discharging thousands of tons of lead shot into the environment every year.

According to Professor Ian Newton, Senior Ornithologist with the Natural Environment Research Council, 'Lead is also causing huge incidental mortality in wildlife. Some species ingest spent gunshot along with grit, while others ingest lead fragments from the carcasses and gut piles of shot animals on which they feed.'¹² In addition, there is a massive annual challenge to wildlife by releasing, within the space of a few weeks, millions of pheasants and partridges. Native wildlife must compete with this avian influx for food and habitat.



FOXES KILLED BY A SHOOT

Economics

The alleged economic benefits of shooting, as with claims on behalf of hunting prior to the passage of the 2004 Act which banned that bloodsport, are based on incomplete data and are exaggerated.

Animal Aid has demonstrated the industry's consistent failure to pay business rates¹³ and VAT. The latter amounts to a shortfall estimated by HMRC to be between £12 million and £20 million.¹⁴ For a detailed analysis, see Animal Aid's reports *A Law unto Themselves* and *Cheap Shots*.

Conclusion

For more than a decade, Animal Aid has campaigned against the 'game bird' industry, producing films and detailed reports of our investigations that expose the cruelty and wastefulness of breeding and shooting birds for sport. Our work has been reported extensively in the media, and has attracted growing support from members of the public and politicians.

This report summarises the problems with shooting, by highlighting the negative impact the 'sport' has on the environment, on wildlife and, of course, on the tens of millions of birds bred to be used as feathered targets.

Because of the problems described in this report, Animal Aid calls for a ban on the production of birds for 'sport' shooting.



Resources

The following reports by Animal Aid are available via our website or office:

- Fowl Play: the case for a ban on the production of pheasants and other birds for 'sport shooting' (2004)
<http://www.animalaid.org.uk/images/pdf/booklets/fowl.pdf>
- Assault and Battery: the nightmare existence of egg-producing 'game birds' (2005)
<http://www.animalaid.org.uk/images/pdf/booklets/assault.pdf>
- A Law Unto Themselves: the game shooting industry under the spotlight (2006)
<http://www.animalaid.org.uk/h/n/CAMPAIGNS/pheasant/ALL/1457/>
- Cheap Shots: how the bird shooting industry deprives the public purse (2006)
<http://www.animalaid.org.uk/images/pdf/cheapshots.pdf>
- Cheating the Public: how the game shooting industry misuses the organic label (2008)
<http://www.animalaid.org.uk/images/pdf/factfiles/shootingorganic.pdf>
- The Game Drain: how £millions are spent on producing a food that is worth a fraction of its production cost (2008)
<http://www.animalaid.org.uk/images/pdf/gamedrain.pdf>

References

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- 2 *Shooting Times*, 22 July 2009, page 7.
- 3 Alexander Chancellor, *The Guardian*, 17 April 2009.
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2009/apr/17/alexander-chancellor-bankers-expenses>
- 4 Alex Renton, *The Times*, 9 January 2009.
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- 5 Rose Prince, *The Telegraph*, 24 November 2005.
<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/foodanddrink/3323065/Savvy-shopper-Pheasant.html>
- 6 *Country Life*, 1 February 2001.
- 7 PACEC, *The Economic and Environmental Impact of Sporting Shooting*, 2006, page 22.
- 8 op.cit. Page 23.
- 9 Adrian Yallop, *New Scientist* magazine, 12 August 2006.
- 10 *The Game Drain*, 2008. www.animalaid.org.uk/images/pdf/gamedrain.pdf
- 11 op.cit.
- 12 Professor Ian Newton, D.Phil, D.Sc, FRS, OBE, 15 May 2008 (Summary of the main findings and conclusions of the conference 'Ingestion of spent ammunition: implications for wildlife and humans').
- 13 *A Law Unto Themselves*, Animal Aid, Dec 06:
<http://www.animalaid.org.uk/h/n/CAMPAIGNS/pheasant/ALL/1457/>
- 14 *The shooting industry's £20 million tax dodge exposed*, Animal Aid, 14 December 2006
http://www.animalaid.org.uk/h/n/NEWS/pr_shooting/ALL/1468/



Animal Aid exposes and campaigns peacefully against all animal abuse, and promotes a cruelty-free lifestyle

Published by Animal Aid – February 2010

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