

FOWL PLAY



The Case for a Ban on the Production of Pheasants and other Birds for 'Sport Shooting'

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Every year in Britain, around 35 million pheasants are mass-produced like commercial poultry so that they can be shot down by wealthy 'guns', who commonly pay £1,000 per day for the 'privilege'. In an effort to eliminate the bird-on-bird aggression caused by the crowded conditions in the rearing sheds and release pens, gamekeepers fit the pheasants with various

devices. These restrict their vision and prevent them from pecking at their cagemates. They even have the ends of their beaks burnt or sliced off.



'Bitted', pheasant chicks in crowded shed

Large numbers of pheasants inevitably attract – and, in fact, boost the populations of – predator species such as stoats, weasels, foxes and members of the crow family. Gamekeepers deliberately kill them by setting traps and snares. But species ranging from badgers to cats and dogs – even protected birds of prey like owls and kestrels – are caught and killed. Millions of animals are slaughtered every year in these 'predator control' programmes.

Because of the enfeeblement that results from being reared in sheds, around half of the pheasants die before they can be gunned down.

They perish from exposure, starvation, disease, predation, or under the wheels of motor vehicles. And given that a small group of shooters can kill up to 500 birds a day, many of the victims are not actually eaten. According to an editorial in *Country Life* magazine (February 1, 2001) some of the 'surplus' is buried in specially dug holes. Added to these



Rabbit killed by Fenn trap

INTRODUCTION



KH



casualties are the numerous unretrieved birds who die slowly from their gunshot wounds, out of sight of the guns.

The basic animal protection laws in the UK decree that an offence is committed when an animal is subjected to 'unnecessary suffering'. There are many views on what constitutes unnecessary suffering. At one end of the spectrum is the pain animals endure undergoing veterinary treatments designed to advance or preserve their health. At the opposite pole, in Animal Aid's view, is the bird shooting industry where purpose-bred animals are shot for pleasure. The suffering experienced by these birds, while they are being fattened for the kill and as they repeatedly run the gauntlet of the guns, cannot plausibly be justified as 'necessary'.

In Holland, producing birds for 'sport shooting' was first curbed in 1986 and outlawed entirely in 2002. The action was taken because the practice was judged to be morally and environmentally unsupportable. We have set out in this report the case for a similar ban to be introduced into Britain.

'I'm very upset by the way pheasants are raised for sport. They are born cooped up in tiny cages and, after a few weeks, released into pens in the countryside, where they become technically free range. Then, just before the shooting season, they're released into the wild to do what they like – just when all hell breaks loose.

'Most people go to shoot without thinking of cooking. The excess of this huge business is hundreds of pheasants that just get bulldozed into the ground.'

Old Etonian celebrity chef, Hugh Fearnley-Wittingstall

Daily Telegraph August 20, 2004

No reliable figures

Despite the scale of pheasant production and shooting in Britain, the industry has not troubled itself to develop reliable, up-to-date information on the number of birds involved. But bearing in mind past industry data, plus forecasts of sales growth, it can be estimated that around 35 million birds are released every year. The release of this enormous 'avian biomass' inevitably has a destabilising impact on established wildlife populations with whom the pheasants will compete for food and cover. The natural landscape is also damaged by this sudden influx.

The 'breeding stock' is typically kept in small pens. Their eggs are collected, incubated in ovens and the chicks reared in heated sheds before being moved, aged six or seven weeks, into large 'release pens'.

Animal Aid has gathered evidence relating to every stage of the production process, most recently at a state-of-the-art breeding unit in Powys comprising row upon row of metal pens. Each pen was just 2ft wide, 4 ft long and 1 ft high and yet incarcerated within were one cock pheasant and six or seven females. The majority had been feather-pecked by stressed cagemates, some so severely that their backs and necks were bare and bloody. This was despite all of them having been fitted with oppressive 'anti-aggression' face masks.

The pens themselves were devoid of any comfort. The pen floor was wire mesh, the sides were made from solid alloy and there was a flexible mesh roof. The floor was at an angle so that eggs could roll through for ease of collection. The pens were elevated about one metre from the ground and were in tight, seemingly endless open-air rows. The area covered totalled at least two acres, or the equivalent of two football pitches.

HOW PHEASANTS ARE PRODUCED



Vast expanse of breeding pens

Predators exterminated

Once hatched, pheasant chicks are moved to heated sheds, each typically holding one or two hundred birds. Attached to each shed is a small outdoor covered run, to which the birds have access once they are considered hardy enough. At seven or eight weeks they are moved from the sheds to release enclosures – large fenced-in units that can hold thousands of birds. As the shooting season approaches (it runs from October 1 to February 1) the birds are encouraged into fields of cover crops and, come shooting days, beaten up into the sky to serve as feathered targets.

Throughout the whole process, the pheasants are fed and medicated – and any animal perceived as threatening their survival is exterminated. Even after their release, strategically placed feed hoppers entice the pheasants to remain within the vicinity so that paying customers are not short of targets. When each day's



Artificially hatched chicks are loaded into bins ready for transportation.

shooting stops, feed is used to seduce the survivors back into cover so that they are available to face the guns on another day.

Mutilations and restraints

As indicated, the crowded, unnatural conditions within the sheds lead to aggression.

Gamekeepers attempt to counteract this by a variety of mutilations and physical restraints. Perhaps the most severe 'procedure' is 'debeaking'. In its 1997 Report on the Welfare of Laying Hens, the government's official agricultural advisory body – known as the Farm Animal Welfare Council (FAWC) – stated: 'We consider that beak trimming is a most undesirable mutilation which should be avoided if at all possible and only used if essential to prevent worse welfare problems of injurious feather pecking and cannibalism.' The report adds: '...if beak trimming is essential, it should be carried out at up to 10 days of age...' (1)

Despite this clear welfare warning, pheasants may be debeaked repeatedly in their short lives. The industry lobby group, the Game Conservancy (GC) has advised: 'The beak will normally grow back again after 10 to 14 days, when a further feather pecking outbreak may occur, requiring additional treatment. Some game rearers automatically repeat the beak trimming process at 10-14 day intervals.' (2)

An increasingly popular alternative to debeaking is fitting the birds with 'bits'. These are incomplete rings of plastic or metal that are designed to prevent the beak from closing, so minimising damage from aggressive pecking. Bits are fed between the upper and lower mandibles and clipped into the nostrils to keep them in place. According to a supplier of the devices, they commonly cause sinusitis. Bitted animals are also frustrated in their attempts to pick up small particles of food.

Gamekeepers also employ spectacles – or 'specs'. These blinker-like devices, which are also clipped into the nostrils, are designed to limit their field of vision, thereby reducing aggression. Another reason for



Many birds are fitted with plastic 'specs' - clipped to their nostrils

HOW PHEASANTS ARE PRODUCED



Breeding birds incarcerated in tiny metal pen (see p4)
- fitted with oppressive 'anti-aggression' face masks

employing specs is to minimise egg eating in breeders.

In a further effort to modify behaviour, birds may be fitted with brails – bands of material looped over the shoulder of one wing and twisted to keep the wing closed. This is to prevent escape from unroofed pens. Wing-spreading and preening are basic behavioural needs. Brailing makes these impossible.

Disease rife

Just as bird-on-bird aggression is a feature of the crowded sheds and pens, so are bacterial, viral and parasitic diseases. The birds are liberally dosed with a range of medicinal products in an effort to limit the outbreaks.

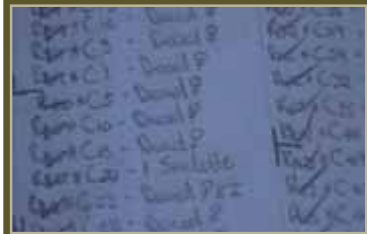
Until recently, the drug dimetridazole (DMZ) was routinely prescribed for reared pheasants to combat devastating infestation caused by protozoan parasites. Widespread administration took place even though DMZ is a suspected carcinogen (cancer-causing substance) and has been banned in every European Union country except Britain. The drug is given in the grain feed and water and, while there is a withdrawal period of 28 days prior to the birds' destruction, the only protection for the consumer is an inadequate sampling programme administered by the Veterinary Medicines Directorate.

The veterinary drugs company Merial has now stopped production of DMZ. It did so when it became clear that the European Commission was not prepared to continue licensing DMZ for British game birds, despite the industry's protestations. It is still legal in Britain, however, to administer the drug to game birds – and the shooting industry retains stocks that it intends to use.

HOW PHEASANTS ARE PRODUCED



These chicks died before they could be shot.



Shed 'dead list'

A particularly graphic picture of life and death in the sheds came with the June 2004 publication of a League Against Cruel Sports (LACS) undercover investigation, called *Bred To Be Wild*. The account LACS presented – supported by filmed and documentary evidence – was one of ‘cruelty, cannibalism and over-crowding at a number of game rearing farms across England, with thousands of birds dying as a result of appalling battery-like conditions and negligence by staff with little or no formal training in animal husbandry’.



A male breeder has been feather-pecked despite his female cagemates having been fitted with face masks.

HOW PHEASANTS ARE SHOT



Game birds are released in compact localised areas. To keep them continually within range for big-spending shooting customers, cover crops are planted, natural cover is extended, feed and water is provided and snares and traps are set to combat the unnaturally large numbers of indigenous predators attracted to the unbalanced supply of prey.

Pheasants are ground-dwelling creatures of the woodland edge. They fly badly and briefly. An energy sapping power flap, never lasting longer than 10 seconds, is followed by a gliding descent. Pheasants are particularly vulnerable at the start of the season when, having been carefully preserved by their keepers, the institutionalised birds are suddenly scared into the sky and shot at. During these early weeks, they are often seen blundering through hedgerows or meandering across busy country roads where many meet their death.



Thrill of the kill

Shooting magazines seek to present the slaughter as an even contest between canny prey and adept hunter.

Christopher Graffius of the lobby group, the British Association of Shooting and Conservation (BASC) conjured up just such a scenario, when he wrote in the *Daily Telegraph*:

‘The enjoyment of pheasant shooting lies in being among friends in beautiful country in pursuit of a testing quarry with the end result of food on many tables. The thrill is in the pleasure of a good and challenging shot, much the same as the pleasure taken in any sport or work well done.’ (3)

Enjoyable it may be for the armed participants but, from the birds’ perspective, it is a day of bloody carnage. Just as the workers in the sheds often lack proper formal training, so anyone – even a child of nine – can pick up a shotgun and, untutored, attempt to bring down these feathered targets.

Untutored guns

There is no compulsory training or examination of shooting skills in Britain and in several parts of the country young children have been granted firearms certificates in their own names. Even where a skilled shooter is involved, the nature of the spread-shot cartridge cannot guarantee a humane death. Some birds fall alive and flightless from altitude. The industry’s own code demands that they be picked up by dogs or shoot members and quickly despatched. Many wounded birds, however, are never recovered, particularly in the undulating densely covered terrain favoured by shoot operators. If 35 million birds are released annually and ‘just’ 5% are hit but not killed outright, 1.75 million will have faced a slow death by hunger, thirst, exposure, or at the mercy of predators.

I



A downed bird struggles to rise before his life gives out.

HOW PHEASANTS ARE SHOT



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Two shooters go about their 'sport' showing little regard for the sheep.

I
K



A shooter clubs a downed bird in a protracted attempt to kill her.

Can it be plausibly claimed that the suffering caused to these purpose-bred birds was 'necessary'?

Theo Hopkins of Oakford in Devon also wrote to the *Daily Telegraph*:

'I recently saw a pheasant shot and wounded 40 yards above the ground. The 2lb bird, flapping and shedding feathers, hit the ground with an audible thump. It couldn't fly, but tried to run. A dog grabbed it by the wing and dragged it across the field and through a dense hedge. The bird and wing parted company. The dog looked momentarily confused, but then thankfully grabbed the body. The bird continued to flap around at the Gun's feet awhile, while he waited for his next shot. Eventually he picked up the bird by the feet and repeatedly swung its head against a fence post.' (4)





The Draft Animal Welfare Bill was written after consultation with interested groups against a background in which the government promised to leave shooting unscathed as a country bloodsport. Between July and August 2004, the draft entered a further period of consultation.

EAST ANGLIAN DAILY TIMES



Shot birds are dumped. The owner of the shoot claimed the vehicle the pheasants were in was stolen.

Annex I of the bill deals with 'gamebirds'. It acknowledges that, unlike poultry, such birds 'are reared primarily for sport shooting'. It further acknowledges that they lack the legal protection [meagre though that is] afforded other farmed animals by the Agriculture (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1968. Instead, the roughly 300 game farms in England and Wales are 'answerable' only to a voluntary code of practice concocted by the industry itself. The proposal contained in the new bill is that this voluntary code be adopted, with unspecified adjustments, as law. We believe that the evidence presented in this Animal Aid report points firmly in the direction of a Dutch-style ban.

As we have seen, even after their release, pheasants continue to be fed, watered and protected from predators. These interventions on the part of gamekeepers clearly afford the birds the status of 'protected' animals, given that they are – in the terminology of the draft bill – 'kept by man'.

Even if animals are in the temporary custody of man, the bill states that they enjoy the status of a protected animal. Causing protected animals to suffer unnecessarily will be an offence. It will also be an offence for the keeper of a protected animal to allow another person to cause that animal to suffer unnecessarily.

Guilty under the new law!

The bill asserts that killing animals is not, in itself, inconsistent with the duty to ensure their welfare, if the killing is done 'humanely'. But the use of spread-shot cartridges at range, with attendant risks of wounding and consequent protracted suffering at the hands of untrained 'guns', cannot be considered humane. It follows that, under the bill as drafted, a gamekeeper or his employer, or both, will be guilty of allowing animals – for whom they are responsible – to be subjected to unnecessary suffering. A deceitful way forward would be to manipulate the wording of the bill in an attempt to exonerate shoot operators. The moral way forward would be to 'Go Dutch' and ban all bird production and releases.



GREED AND EXCESS

How many of the 35 million pheasants released every year are actually eaten? In the September 27, 2001 issue of *Shooting Times* magazine, a BASC spokesman declared 'the BASC estimates that 30 to 35 million pheasants are reared, of which up to 16 million are shot during the season'. The spokesman went on to declare: 'The average shooting achieves a 50 to 60 per cent return from birds reared. The remaining 40 to 50 per cent is lost from a variety of causes, including predation, straying or death through natural causes.' Before moving on to the question of how many of the shot birds are eaten, we can observe that the BASC acknowledges that roughly half the released birds do not survive long enough to be shot. As noted earlier, this high attrition rate results in large part from what we refer to as their 'institutionalised' start in life. Especially in the first weeks, the released birds are incompetent compared with truly wild birds. They are also comparatively feeble, less able to find food for themselves and thus more prone than wild birds to disease and starvation.

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It is difficult to be precise about the percentage of shot birds who are eaten. The industry has never done a thorough audit of this or of other key aspects of production and killing. The BASC, for obvious reasons, has claimed that there is very little wastage. We can see, however, that this claim is at odds with frequent



references, in a number of pro-shooting journals, to the 'Big Bags'/over-production phenomenon. Notably, the February 1, 2001 leading article in *Country Life* stated that 'about 13 million pheasants were shot during this past season, which is probably twice as many as the market can absorb'. In other words, half the birds shot are not eaten. The article goes on to say that 'in some areas, over-supply has led to shoots being forced to give away their bags, or worse still, bury their surplus'. Animal Aid has, in past reports, drawn attention to other admissions by industry insiders of 'greed and excess' – admissions that birds are produced to serve as mere living targets and that a great many of the victims are not eaten. Embarrassed by the self-incriminating statements, a new reticence has taken hold. However, we believe that the comments, reproduced below and overleaf, from the industry's own leading advocates, remain indicative of the current situation.

The taste of victory

'It is staggering, and more than a little embarrassing, that far too many shooters don't eat the game they shoot. If we don't do our bit, then how can anyone complain about low game prices and attacks on rearing? We have to "Eat for victory".'

Comment, Julian Murray-Evans, Editor

Shooting Times & Country Magazine, August 30, 2001



Pheasants: feathered targets or food?

'...many large estates now shoot four or even five days a week from November to the end of January, killing as many as 2,000 birds a week. Shooting on such a large scale can be justified if there is a ready market for the birds bagged. This no longer exists. During this past season the price paid by game dealers for a brace of pheasants has fallen to between 60p and 80p a brace. In some areas, over-supply has led to shoots being forced to give away their bags, or, worse still, bury their surplus...

There is one simple reason for the slump in demand for pheasants: over-supply. About 13 million pheasants were shot during this past season, which is probably twice as many as the market can absorb...

Worryingly, on many commercial shoots, pheasants and partridges are regarded as feathered targets, not food. Many people who shoot even decline to take home their traditional brace of birds...

Demand for big bags has led to considerable overstocking with tame, hand-reared birds...

Rearing and releasing game for shooting has already been outlawed in Holland, and there seems little doubt that coming years will see the threat of similar legislation in this country.'

Comment *Country Life, February 1, 2001*

Greed and excess results in 'big bag' syndrome

'You're driving down a country road in August, minding your own business and admiring the view. Suddenly, the road ahead is alive with half-witted pheasant poults scuttling along the verges or trying to commit suicide as they meander aimlessly in front of passing traffic... Smashed bodies are scattered along the tarmac, birds that didn't know the Green Cross Code and the general scenario is hardly one to endear the unknowing urban visitor towards shooting.

... By far the majority of shoots are discreet and try to avoid public conflict or poor public relations, yet there are a number of shoots which are, as we all know, putting down vast numbers of birds in order to meet an increasing demand for commercial driven shooting...

Huge numbers of birds are being reared to provide bags of 400 to 500 or more birds a day, five days a week, at a time when game dealers are paying pennies for dead game and even, in some cases, taking birds away for nothing.

Reports of 40 pheasants to the acre circulate, an imbalance which must inevitably affect the environment into which they are released, while rumours of birds being buried for lack of a market are also rife...'

Nimrod Column, *The Countryman's Weekly, July 20 2001*

A prime function of gamekeepers is the destruction of potential or perceived gamebird predators. The keepers deliberately target foxes, stoats, weasels and corvine birds, because they are attracted to the unnaturally large number of captive and newly-released pheasants. In fact, the presence of so many pheasants draws a higher number of predator species than would otherwise be the case. The birds provide a food source, which boosts population levels of those predator animals. Species ranging from badgers to cats – even protected birds of prey like owls and kestrels – are also caught and killed by the indiscriminate snares, poison and body-crushing devices.

Indigenous wildlife destroyed

Using the industry's own data, (e.g. Tapper 1992), a leading ornithologist has calculated that around 1.5 million other birds and more than 3 million mammals are destroyed annually in the name of gamebird protection. Peter Robinson, a former head of investigations for the RSPB, notes that these figures are based on data from an annual volunteer sample of

LACS





game estates and smaller shoots, with the findings expressed as numbers of birds/mammals killed per km². (5)

But given that representative organisations, such as the Game Conservancy Trust or the BASC, know very little about what actually occurs on individuals shoots, it seems likely these figures represent underestimates.

Birds of prey killed illegally

'Although biologically important birds of prey are afforded full protection throughout Britain,'

says Robinson, 'their illegal destruction on shooting and/or agricultural land continues.' RSPB annual statistics routinely show birds such as Red Kites and Buzzards are deliberately poisoned. Even Goshawks and Golden Eagles have fallen victim. This is in addition to other raptors who have been shot or trapped. (6) Historically, the published figures are believed to represent just a small proportion of the overall number killed annually in this way.

'While it is accepted that not all of these animals died as a direct result of gamebird protection policies,' says Robinson 'the percentage attributable to this cause is believed to be high, and in any event these incidents frequently involve land also used for shooting.'

At war with nature

Robinson adds: 'Many involved in gamebird management now fully understand (but not necessarily accept) that natural predation is an inevitable fact, but there are still far too many land owners, land tenants and gamebird managers who fail to understand the role played by natural predators – to the point even of advocating the destruction of entire populations, or removal of those species from entire areas, e.g. Hen Harriers from grouse moors. Such thinking is wholly out of place in a world increasingly governed by issues of biodiversity and sustainability.'

6



Kestrel caught by a Fenn trap illegally set above ground



The BASC employs 80 personnel, has a financial turnover of £4.5million and works hard to give shooting an acceptable face. It insists that shooting aids conservation and biodiversity, when no scientific study exists, or statistics are not available, detailing the size of the industry and its impact on the environment. Even the Game Conservancy admits that there is potential for large-scale damage in the release areas. (7)

What is the true environmental impact picture? The following snapshots offer some pointers.

Crop damage and soil erosion

'...the ecological impact of releasing 20 or more birds per hectare - a common stocking figure on many commercial shooting estates - is serious. It not only reduces the breeding success of wild stock, but leads to crop damage, soil erosion round release pens, and a greatly increased risk of disease...

Country Life, February 1, 2001

'A Squalid, Environmentally Damaging Agribusiness'

Theo Hopkins used to allow pheasant shooting in his West Country wood. The following is an edited version of an account he wrote for our first major report on pheasant production, called *The Killing Fields* (2000).

'10 years ago I bought 50 acres of beautiful, ancient, semi-natural oak woodland near Oakford in Devon. I manage it for the wildlife and to maintain the natural ecology, as well as looking after the more ecologically diverse and important woodland edges. Devon is notable for its traditional hedgebanks.

The shoot offered to rent my land: £500 in my back pocket each year for just allowing them to feed and shoot a few pheasants. Not bad. Woodlands cost money to maintain, even when managed for biodiversity. I happily accepted.

In the second year, the shoot expanded and intensified. One evening I went up to my precious hedgebank. I was horrified. A hundred pheasants in a hundred metres were demolishing the bank – crawling over it like feathered maggots. The floral layer, violets, mosses, dog's mercury and bluebells were being rooted up, the earth turned to dry dust. And with them went the bugs and beasties that feed the native birds, mice and voles. I told the shoot to leave: keep your money, I want my hedges intact.

The shoot grew and expanded. I discovered that damage was happening all around me, and even the Exmoor National Park Authority were having trouble.

All around me were cover crops of kale and maize. Lines of plastic feeders sprang up by the hedges, encouraging yet more damage. And netted release pens were being constructed, inside which hundreds of birds fresh from the even more crowded rearing sheds were crammed together. The more I found out about the shooting, the more I realised that this was a squalid, environmentally damaging agribusiness. (Agribusiness was the gamekeeper's own word for his enterprise.)

My woodland and hedges are being damaged. Hedges elsewhere are being damaged. A neighbour is losing the grapes from his vineyard. The pheasants are eating all the natural food that a friend wants for his free-range ducks. People's vegetable gardens are being pecked to pieces. Pheasants swarm all over the local roads: there has been at least one local car accident. Can they explain why this is allowable?

Lead shot deposits

The Chartered Institute of Environmental Health (CIEH) has estimated that, as a result of sport shooting, 8,000 tonnes of contaminating toxic lead shot is scattered over the land and watercourses annually. (8)



In a letter to *The Times* in August 2004, a CIEH representative wrote: 'Much of this shot is discharged over the limited areas of shooting clubs, when special events can involve several tonnes of shot left on the ground... Public concern has dealt with lead in petrol, paint, toys, piping and anglers' weights, but the

deliberate addition of lead shot to the environment continues. This contamination is not the unavoidable by-product of essential industry, but results mainly from a leisure pursuit.'

Ornithologist Peter Robinson (see page 17) is convinced that the true volume of lead shot deposits is much greater.

'Lead is a broad-spectrum metabolic poison,' he notes, 'producing toxic effects in animal tissue and attacking behavioural and reproductive systems. Lead-associated effects of ingested shot by waterfowl or gamebirds, or by wounding, are often lethal to the individual, whereas predators and scavengers face a high risk of accumulative ingested secondary poisoning. In North America, such secondary lead poisoning is believed to have played a key role in the demise of the wild California Condor population.

'The 1990s move by the USA towards total lead shot bans within main shooting areas is now mirrored in Britain by a ban on use of lead shot over selected wetlands (only). This means that, within Britain, at least 50% of all shotgun discharges continue to contain lead shot... Apart from the obvious environmental unacceptability of this situation, the industry also seems unconcerned by the likely detrimental consequences of gamebirds ingesting lead shot, and their subsequent consumption by human consumers.'

It is these issues of animal welfare and negative environmental impacts that led to the ban on the production of birds in Holland for 'sport shooting'. There is no hunting with horses and hounds in the Netherlands and shooting game with a shotgun is called hunting.

In the 1980s, Dierenbescherming Nederland (The Dutch Society for the Protection of Animals) commissioned opinion polls to test public support for a ban on the release of 'game' for hunting. As well as concern for animal welfare, the polls revealed considerable disquiet over the potential for damage to the environment by large releases of pheasants. More than half of the land area of the Netherlands is agricultural and damage to crops and to the general agricultural environment is a major issue. Dutch ideas about such questions run directly counter to how the British shooting industry strives to connect shooting with conservation.

No hunting, no predator 'control'

In 1986, legislation was introduced in Holland curbing the release of pheasants for hunting – a statute that has been superseded by the Netherlands Flora and Fauna Act of 2002. The initial law made it permissible to breed and release pheasants to replace any who had been destroyed by agricultural activity (such as the destruction of nests during mowing). Under the 2002 statute, which followed years of national debate, even that exception is disallowed. It is not forbidden to breed pheasants or keep them as pets, but any pheasants reared for food must be 'humanely' slaughtered and/or sold to a poulterer.

Today, the hunting of five species is permitted: wild hare, pheasant, mallard, pigeon and rabbit. The breeding and release of live quarry is forbidden.

All netting, trapping and snaring of predator animals is also prohibited in Holland, except for the live trapping of crows, using cages and reared decoys.

The Dutch recognise that predation is a natural phenomenon, and do not allow unnatural releases of prey species to create an imbalance. Consequently, there is no scope to claim that the destruction of artificially engendered predators is contributing to conservation or biodiversity.



H



Licensing hunters

Every year, the Netherlands issues 30,000 hunting licences. Applicants must be 18 years or over and first prove their competence in an examination. Similar tests are conducted in Germany, Belgium and Luxembourg. The education of hunters was started on a voluntary basis in the 1960s and, through the Dutch Game Act of 1977, the examination became compulsory.

Applicants must, additionally, hold an insurance voucher covering third party risk to a minimum value of £6million. In this regard, the Dutch prescribe safety zones for the public. The hunting ground must be on private land and be no less than 40 hectares (99 acres). The land must have a minimum width of 300 metres.

We have seen in this report that, while the pheasant killing industry seeks to promote the notion of noble tradition and countryside custodianship, there is very little that is natural about the modern game production and shooting industry. Millions of birds are intensively reared every year in order to satisfy the base appetites of wealthy 'guns' who often show little appetite for their quarry once they have brought it down.

There is no obligation upon these guns to undergo any training and it is not uncommon for the 'marksmen' to be nine or ten years old. Even after they have been released, the birds continue to be fed so that they remain in the vicinity of the estate and at the disposal of the guns on successive shooting days. It is, in short, a ruthless, cynical 'game' in which the birds are made dependent on their keepers for food and shelter and are then betrayed by those same individuals.

Going Dutch

Animal Aid is firmly of the view that the introduction of a pheasant rearing and shooting Code of Conduct, based on the industry's own guidance, is not the way forward. We, instead, urge the government to introduce a total ban on the production of pheasants and other birds for 'sport shooting'. Such a ban already operates successfully in the Netherlands.

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

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