



Briefing for the Welsh elections 2021 on the use of cages to confine breeding gamebirds

Campaign Aim: to ban the battery cages used to confine breeding game birds

Executive summary:

Several huge game bird farms across the UK use battery-style cages to breed a large proportion of the 60 million pheasants and partridges released by the shooting industry each year.

There is widespread political and public support for a ban on these cages. A 2021 YouGov poll in Wales found that 72% of people opposed their use.

The barren cages cause serious welfare problems for the birds including exposure to extreme temperatures, foot problems and head-scalping

Pheasant and partridge farming

Around 60 million pheasants and partridges are purpose-bred for the shooting industry each year.¹

Although not all are bred in the UK, huge game bird farms – such as Bettws Hall in Powys – are responsible for a vast number of the birds produced. It is thought that between six and ten farms across the UK use raised, battery-style laying units to confine the breeding birds.

Each pheasant-breeding cage holds one male and between eight and ten females. Partridges are confined in breeding pairs in enclosed metal boxes that are smaller and just as bleak as the pheasant units.

These breeding birds produce eggs, which are removed and hatched, and the resulting offspring are reared for shoots where they will be used as feathered targets.

Support for a ban:

A ban on the use of cages by the shooting industry has political and public support.

- A 2018 Early Day Motion was supported by 121 MPs.
- In 2018, the Minister for Environment for Wales, Hannah Blythyn, stated ‘... ***the Welsh Government does not support commercial pheasant shooting, or the breeding of gamebirds or the birds being held in holding pens on the estate prior to release on the Welsh Government Estate.***’
- A 2021 YouGov poll, commissioned by the League Against Cruel Sports, found that 72 per cent of people in Wales oppose the use of cages for breeding game birds
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Animal Welfare: Issues with the Raised Battery Cages

- The cages do not adhere to the core values of the Animal Welfare Act
- The cages cause stress, because the birds are wild and want to escape
- Game keepers use ‘bits’ to restrict the birds’ beaks – a further indicator of the stress they suffer
- The cages cause injuries – such as foot problems and head-scalping from repeatedly flying upwards into the cage roof, in an effort to escape
- The cages are exposed to the elements and the birds have little respite from the wind, rain, cold and burning sun. We have recorded temperatures as high as 41C in summer and -4C in winter inside the cages.
- Game farms are not randomly or routinely inspected by government agencies – there were just 14 inspections in 2020. It is thought there are around 300 game farms in the UK.
- We have discovered numerous incidents of animal welfare breaches through our investigations – for example, barren cages without nesting, foraging or any enrichment
- The official welfare Code is not enforced – even when complaints are made and inspections ensue
- Abolishing the cages would have a huge impact on the welfare of the birds, and would be a progressive and positive move
- The cost of moving away from raised cages could be absorbed by this wealthy industry. The Times in 2019 reported that Bettws Hall’s ‘turnover was £14 million, up 12 per cent on the previous year’.²

- If the Welsh Government banned the use of these battery cages, it would likely affect just one establishment in Wales

References

1. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2020/oct/30/pheasant-and-partridge-classified-as-species-that-imperil-uk-wildlife>
2. <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/business-has-never-been-better-says-bettws-hall-shooting-estate-s80x5b8zh>