

# Killing our Countryside

IT'S TIME TO BAN SHOOTING



**ANIMAL AID**  
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FOR ALL ANIMALKIND

A huge game farm with rows  
of raised laying cages



Every year, the shooting industry releases 40-60 million captive-bred, non-native pheasants and partridges into the British countryside, to be shot for sport.

This massive scale of release means other animals are forced to compete for food and habitat, disrupting ecosystems and threatening native wildlife.

Every August, the biomass of these birds exceeds that of ALL other wild birds in Britain, and the problem is widespread, with 1 in 12 woodlands in England containing a pheasant release pen.



**OUR INVESTIGATORS FOUND  
DEAD BIRDS IN CAGES  
ALONGSIDE THE LIVING,  
KILLED EITHER BY FIGHTING  
INJURIES, DISEASE OR  
EXPOSURE TO THE ELEMENTS.**

Where factory farming meets  
bloodsports

Animal Aid has investigated the massive industrial breeding farms in the UK, which imprison the parent birds in metal cages, in order to produce millions of young birds to be shot. It is a highly automated system designed to maximise the number of eggs, with minimal human intervention: in practice it is incredibly cruel, with frustrated birds forced together unnaturally, to breed in tiny cages. Our investigators found dead birds in cages with the living, killed either by fighting injuries, disease or exposure to the elements.

The eggs are collected, incubated and hatched, and the chicks will then either be sold off to be reared, or destroyed in huge grinding machines if considered sub-standard.



## Rearing and releasing

The chicks from the parent birds will be reared in giant sheds which can hold tens of thousands of chicks and – as with any industrialised farming operation – the weak will not survive the competition for food and water.

The next stage sees them transferred to release pens to acclimatise them to life outdoors – life that will soon end at the start of the shooting season.

## The impacts on wildlife

The release of tens of millions of pheasants and partridges into the countryside every year has multiple, serious impacts for flora and fauna:

- These non-native birds overgraze vegetation, leading to habitat degradation and loss of plant diversity.
- Pheasants use hedgerows as corridors leading from release pens to the cover crops provided for the birds. Their browsing negatively impacts hedgerow species such as yellowhammer, as well as other farmland birds.
- They are larger than many native birds and their brood size is greater.
- Pheasants and red-legged partridges consume high volumes of insects and other invertebrates and there is serious concern that nesting pheasants are outcompeting other farmland birds for food.
- The birds eat invertebrates, like beetles, spiders, ants, caterpillars, slugs, snails, earthworms, flies and butterflies, as well as some vertebrates, such as reptiles, amphibians, small mammals and even young birds. This has a direct impact on the numbers and distribution



of these creatures, who play essential roles in food chains, ecosystems and the diets of much native wildlife.

- Pheasant-rearing has been specifically blamed for adder declines and it is likely that local populations of all six British reptiles could be affected by pheasant predation.

## Poisoning the land – and other animals

More than 7,000 tonnes of lead ammunition are discharged into the UK countryside by the shooting industry every year, posing a serious threat to birds, wildlife and ecosystems by contaminating soil and water. Other than being directly shot with lead ammunition, the biggest single cause of poisoning is ingestion of lead gunshot which many wild birds mistake for grit. Birds of prey and other animals may accidentally consume lead from eating prey or the carcass of a dead animal.

## Deliberate destruction of native animals

The release of so many pheasants and partridges attracts other ‘predator’ animals, to the birds themselves, as well as to the grain used to feed the released birds.

Gamekeepers trap and kill any animal seen to be a threat to the released birds – such as crows and foxes. The use of rat poisons by gamekeepers not only kills rats but also affects wood mice, bank voles, field voles and shrews, causing local population declines.

Shooting estates and their staff have also been repeatedly linked to illegal raptor persecution.





© Illustration by Nick Hayes

The shooting industry produces millions of pheasants and partridges every year, just to use them as feathered targets. Beyond the terrible harm inflicted on the birds imprisoned on 'game farms' – and to their offspring who are born to be shot – there are serious repercussions for native wildlife who must compete with pheasants and partridges for food and habitat.

Land and water is contaminated by lead shot, killing plants and animals.

Ecosystems are devastated by the release of millions of non-native birds, whose biomass is greater than that of all wild birds. They

compete for food, change soil nutrients, trample flora and predate on local wildlife.

Wildlife such as peregrine falcons, hen harriers and owls are persecuted by gamekeepers to 'protect' their 'stock' of birds.

Avian flu can be transmitted from released pheasants and partridges to other birds.

All of this harm just so that a small number of people can shoot live birds for 'fun'. It's a highly industrialised process – a million miles from the portrayal of shooting being a rural, natural pastime.

The UK is one of the most nature-depleted countries in the world and we need to take urgent action to protect biodiversity. If we don't, the consequences will be irreversible and dire. The cruel shooting industry is part of this story of ecological decline. **It's been tolerated for too long.**

**It's time to ban shooting. Let's stop killing the countryside.**

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