



Chris Gomersall (rspb-images.com)

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

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| Centre for Ecology and Hydrology | National Gamekeepers' Organisation |
| Country Land and Business Association | National Trust |
| Countryside Council for Wales | NFU Cymru |
| Deer Commission for Scotland | Northumberland National Park Authority |
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| English Nature | Royal Zoological Society of Scotland |
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| Forestry Commission England | Scottish Executive |
| Forestry Commission Scotland | Scottish Gamekeepers' Association |
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Black grouse and capercaillie

A birdwatchers' code of conduct



Thank you

We hope Britain's birdwatchers will support this code. We are all working to ensure that black grouse and capercaillie 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

Further copies of this code are available from the RSPB UK Headquarters. For more information about black grouse and capercaillie, visit 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.

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

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. 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 capercaillie 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
- improving habitat quality
- removing or marking deer fences
- discouraging fox snares, which are known to kill capercaillie
- reducing rates of predation.

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

Black grouse and capercaillie 'lek' at traditional sites as part of their mating ritual, generally in the spring. The lek is a small gathering of males that display to females before mating. It 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 capercaillie

- 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 capercaillie 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.
- Capercaillie can be easier to see in autumn (from September), as there are usually more birds once juveniles have fledged.
- Capercaillie 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 capercaillie.
- For the best chance of seeing capercaillie, book with a reputable Scottish wildlife tour company, which may have special arrangements with private estates and experience of showing capercaillie to visitors.



Phillip Newman (rspb-images.com)

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.