

Current Status - UK and Local

UK Biodiversity Status: Conservation Concern

LBAP Partnership area Status: Local Priority Species

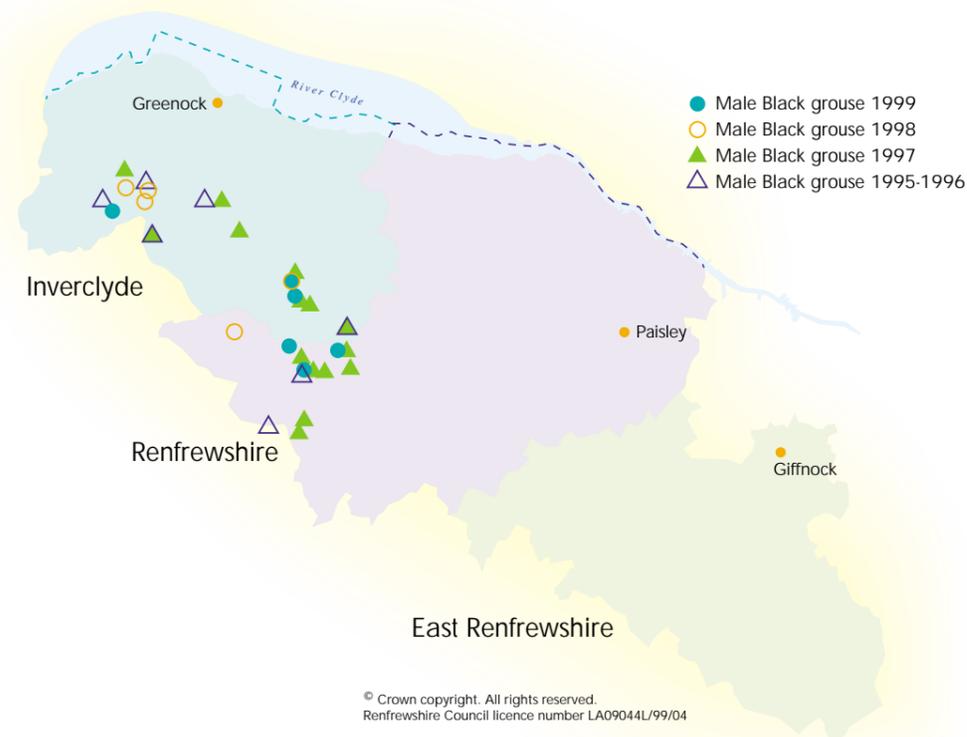
Black Grouse are found throughout northern and central Europe and across Siberia. The species has declined over most of its European range with the number of young reared per hen decreasing by approximately 60% between 1950 and 1990. In some areas of Scotland low survival rates of adults has been an important factor in the population decrease.

Black Grouse are largely dependent on the suitable management of moorland / woodland edge in Scotland and Wales, and the moorland / farmland fringe in northern England. Black Grouse also utilise young conifer plantations and clear-felled areas with well-developed field and shrub layers. Mature plantations with widely spaced trees also support suitable ground vegetation and can be important for Black Grouse.

The species declined in range by 28% between 1968-72 and 1988-91, and the most recent UK population estimate (1996) is 6510 lekking males compared with an estimate of 25,000, in 1990. Numbers of Black Grouse have been recorded mainly within Renfrewshire and Inverclyde since the 1970s. The years 1975 to 1995 represent occasional records and importantly two of the sites had over 6 males with an estimated total population of 45 males. Since 1997, none of the lek sites have had more than two males with an estimated total population of 33 males (1997-1999) and 13 males in 2002.

The extensive moorland of Clyde Muirshiel Regional Park (CMRP) is a key area of extremely high regional importance for its heather moorland, wet grasslands and wooded areas with forestry and intensive farming confined to the fringes. One of the aims of the Regional Park is to improve the conservation diversity of the moorland whilst ensuring that the agricultural value for farmers and for red grouse shooting is not reduced.

DISTRIBUTION OF BLACK GROUSE IN CLYDE MUIRSHIEL REGIONAL PARK



Ecology and Management

Black Grouse are found in areas of moorland, often close to native woodland areas. They feed mainly on heather and blaeberry although they also eat a variety of leaves, stems, buds, flowers, seeds and fruits, and insects in the summer. During courtship the male birds display to the females at communal 'lekking' areas. The birds are normally found in upland areas at an altitude of 200 to 500 metres, and nest on the ground in tall, rank heather, dense blaeberry, rushes or bracken.

Factors Causing Loss or Decline

The main factors attributed to the loss or decline of this species include:

- ★ Loss, degradation and fragmentation of habitat through unsympathetic management practices such as overgrazing, drainage, too frequent muirburn and agricultural improvement
- ★ Human disturbance of lekking birds
- ★ Poor weather conditions which can affect chick survival
- ★ Collisions with deer fences and other obstacles.

Within Renfrewshire and Inverclyde, the likely cause of the loss of habitat for Black Grouse is heavy grazing in moorland areas resulting in the loss of heather and favouring the growth of grass. Over the period 1969 to 1999 there has been a 21% increase in rainfall (recorded at the Paisley Observatory) and this may have encouraged growth of acidic grasses such as Wavy-hair Grass (*Deschampsia flexuosa*). Though muirburn encourages heather, if it is poorly managed this can reduce moorland diversity and lead to the formation of impoverished acidic grasslands. It is also known that conifer plantations have covered previously recorded lek sites at Gryfe Reservoir, Ladymuir and on the Eaglesham moors.



Inverclyde
Renfrewshire
East Renfrewshire
LBAP



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BLACK GROUSE (Tetrao tetrix)

The all-black males have a distinctive red wattle over the eye and show a striking white stripe along each wing in flight. They have a lyre-shaped tail which is fanned out and raised to show white undertail feathers when displaying. The smaller grey-brown females have a slightly notched tail.

Length: 40-55cm Wingspan: 65-80cm

Weight: 1000-1450g (m); 750-1100g (f)



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Opportunities and Current Action

Black Grouse was included on the Red List of endangered species in 1989 and is a Priority Species in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan. It is protected under the Game Acts, Annex 2.2 of the EC Birds Directive, and Appendix III of the Berne Convention.

Management measures to regenerate woodland, reduce grazing and control predators, based on research by the Forestry Commission (FC), Game Conservancy Trust (GCT) and Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), have been shown to increase Black Grouse populations.

Guidelines for conifer forest management were published by the FC in 1993 and are incorporated into FC Forest Design Plans and Native Woodland Management Plans. Guidelines are being given a broader policy context through the UK Forestry Standard. The Forestry Authority has issued a guidance note on deer, forest regeneration and fencing.

Grant aid mechanisms, including the Scottish Forestry Grant Scheme (SFGS), Rural Stewardship Scheme (RSS) and the Moorland Scheme (MS), have the potential to improve much Black Grouse habitat through funding habitat management and fence removal.

Collaborative recovery projects for Black Grouse are being developed and implemented by a range of organisations in different parts of the UK.

The RSPB organised a seminar 'Habitat management for Black Grouse' in March 2002 which was hosted by CMRP. In conjunction with tenant farmers CMRP have used the Macaulay Hill Grazing Model to improve grazing regimes and have organised seminars on the Rural Stewardship Scheme and moorland areas. They also chair a Moorland Management group comprised of a group of interested land users and conservationists. Seminars held by FWAG with CMRP have highlighted the availability of Agri-environment schemes such as the Rural Stewardship Scheme to farmers. Currently there has been limited uptake within the Park area.

Tree planting within the Regional Park has included species beneficial to Black Grouse. Woodland management and tree planting at Park farms also aim to improve their habitat. CMRP, local councils and RSPB have made representation at a scoping exercise for plantation management for Leapmoor Forest. A leaflet has been produced to encourage the public to report any sightings of Black Grouse to staff at the Ranger service CMRP, Kelburn and to the RSPB.

Action Plan

The main aim of this plan is to increase the numbers of Black Grouse in the area to 1997 numbers. In order to achieve this, key priorities are to promote appropriate management of sites and to monitor populations on a biannual basis.



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Objectives and Targets

- Objective 1 Stem or reverse the decline in numbers and range of the Black Grouse in CMRP, in order to restore the population to its 1997 size and range by 2007.
- Objective 2 Promote recolonisation of formerly occupied areas between currently isolated populations.
- Objective 3 Increase the number of sites occupied by Black Grouse through restoration and positive management.
- Objective 4 Establish population trends.
- Objective 5 Increase awareness of the Black Grouse and its conservation needs.
- Objective 6 Review this plan on an annual basis, beginning in 2005.

We will achieve these objectives by:

Action	Actioned	Timescale
Ensuring no net loss of species numbers or range	CMRP, RSPB, FWAG, SNH	2004-2007
Encouraging sympathetic, site-specific management regimes especially within 1.5 km of known lek sites	LAs, FWAG, SNH Landowners/Managers	2004-2007 2004-2007
Developing policies which promote management practices that enhance and restore habitat suitable for Black Grouse	LAs, FWAG, SNH	2004-2007
Monitoring population trends	CMRP, RSPB, SNH, BRISC	2004-2007
Promoting an appreciation of the value of Black Grouse to local communities and land owners	CMRP, GBCP, SNH	2004-2007
Surveying known lek sites	CMRP, RSPB	2004-2007
Collating existing information on Black grouse in East Renfrewshire and organising lek survey at potential sites	RSPB, SOC	2004
Planting Downy birch at Muirshiel at clear felled woodland edge with open ground and one hectre of native woodland at Hardridge	CMRP	2004
Swiping heather areas within Muirshiel woodland	CMRP	2004
Assessing heather cover near lek sites	CMRP, SOC	2004-2010
Identifying potential areas for habitat restoration	CMRP, SOC	2004-2010
Monitoring and recording actions towards these objectives	LBAP Steering Group, LBAP Officer Local Records Centre	Annual/ongoing

Links with Other Action Plans

Broadleaved & Mixed Woodland, Dwarf Shrub Heath, Juniper, Mires, Unimproved Grassland.

Further Information can be obtained from The Biodiversity Officer 0141 842 5281