

Red Grouse

Description

In Northern Ireland, the red grouse is a scarce game bird of heather-dominated habitats. An encounter with a red grouse is often one of surprise when a bird flushes noisily in front of the hillwalker. Red grouse are quite large stocky birds; the males can be orange-yellow or more normally a deep purplish-red, females are much more cryptically coloured. It can be found in heather-dominated habitats including lower-lying large bogs in the west. The best time to see them is late summer/autumn. There has been a severe decline in numbers due to a number of threats including habitat degradation, disease, predation and over-hunting.



The breeding season for the Red Grouse runs from early April to the end of June. The nest is a shallow scrape placed under dense heather where six to twelve eggs are laid. The chicks are able to feed themselves soon after hatching. They feed on insects for the first few weeks and switch to a heather shoot diet of the adults. Family parties gather together in post-breeding season flocks.

Distribution

The highest densities of red grouse are to be found in the hills around the Glens of Antrim. Counties Derry and Tyrone also stronghold of this species. A walk across heathery moorland during July and early August, when the young have fledged, presents the best opportunity to see this species.

Action

Some ASSIs sites hold large numbers of red grouse

DARD management of its own land (Slieveanorra and Glenwhirry) create favourable conditions for grouse.

A few private landowners or consortia manage areas of moorland for grouse, mostly in County Antrim.

Implementation of the Northern Ireland Habitat Action Plans for Blanket Bog, Lowland Raised Bog and Upland Heathland.

Proposed actions to maintain the population and distribution of the red grouse at least at its 2004 level of between 202 and 221 pairs.

Further Information

<http://www.habitas.org.uk/priority/species.asp?item=17>

MLA Species Champion

